

THE EFFECTS OF GENDER DYNAMICS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A  
STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BY

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BENIN CITY, EDO STATE.

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to Almighty God for His guidance, wisdom, and strength throughout the course of this work.

To my beloved family, for their unwavering love, sacrifices, and encouragement, which have been my greatest source of inspiration.

To my lecturers and mentors, whose support and guidance have shaped my academic journey.

Finally, to all students striving to overcome challenges and achieve academic excellence, may this work serve as a source of motivation and contribute to meaningful change.

## CERTIFICATION

We certify that this work titled “The effects of gender dynamics and sexual harassment: A study of university of Benin”, was conducted by Ahmed Kamarudeen Omokhafa with matriculation number SSC2004065 of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin.

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(Head of Department)

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DATE

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DATE

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the effects of gender dynamics and sexual harassment on students at the University of Benin, with a specific focus on the impact these issues have on academic performance. Gender-related challenges, including sexual harassment, continue to affect university students, influencing their overall educational experiences. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted with 100 students to explore the relationship between gender dynamics, sexual harassment, and academic outcomes. The findings reveal a significant negative correlation, with students who experience sexual harassment or encounter gender-based discrimination showing lower academic performance compared to their peers. The study identifies stress, fear of retaliation, and lack of institutional support as major contributors to the detrimental effects of these issues. Based on the findings, the research recommends the establishment of robust counseling services, awareness programs, and stronger institutional policies to address gender-based violence and harassment. This research highlights the need for comprehensive interventions to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Gender dynamics and sexual harassment are issues that are prevalent in universities all over the world. It is a globally pervasive issue that are giving pressing concerns in institutions of higher learning. In recent years, there has been growing awareness and concerns about the pervasive nature of sexual harassment and gender dynamics. The universities whose aim is to provide a safe and inclusive environment for student to pursue academics excellence greatly faces the persistence of sexual harassment and gender dynamics which greatly undermines the universities goals. The reports shows that women undergo more sexual and physical violence than men. The social construct of gender dynamics makes women more vulnerable to sexual harassment by men. Women are harassed in the university by their peers, faculty and departmental staff.

The UN women (2020), reports that 1 in 5 students experience sexual harassment and it is seen as a human right violation with severe physical, sexual and mental consequences undergone by the students. This goes a long way in affecting them academically, socially, emotionally, and even mentally unstable among their peers. The American Association of University Women (AAUW 2015), reports shows that 70% of students witness sexual harassment, with 60% experiencing verbal harassment and 20-30% experiencing physical harassment. AAUW also reports that students are more likely to experience harassment from peers than faculty or staff. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC 2020), emphasized that one in third women worldwide experience physical and sexual violence and 90% of victims do not report incidents. They do not report incidents due to fear of being stigmatized among their peers so they would rather remain silent and continue suffering the violence than report the case.

The understanding of gender dynamics and sexual harassment is crucial to the course of our study. Different authors have different ideology on what they view as gender

dynamics and sexual harassment. Judith Butler (2021), “refers to gender as a social construct, a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience... Gender is performative producing illusion of a stable, essential identity.” Connell and Rebecca (2014), describe gender as a social structure that organizes human practice and social life. They argue that gender is not just a role or identity but a complex set of social relations and processes that influence institutions, culture, and personal interactions". The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) defines gender as the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys, including norms, behaviors, and roles associated with each. As a social construct, gender varies across societies and can change over time.

MacKinnon (2019), describes sexual harassment as a manifestation of systemic gender inequality, where unwanted sexual advances and behaviors are imposed within contexts of unequal power, reinforcing women's subordinate status in society.” Lin Farley (2017) describes “sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual behavior including remarks, gestures and physical contact that creates an intimidating or hostile environment.” According to reports from various existing works, women are more likely to suffer sexual harassment than men. AAUW reports states that 60% of women faces more sexual violence and harassment from men. Also, 90% of the woman do not report the incidents, they would rather keep it to themselves than face stigma from other people. The prevalence of this issue is becoming alarming and needs to be looked into. Gender dynamics and power imbalance contributes to the prevalence of sexual harassment UN women (2020).

In the case of Nigeria, sexual harassment and gender dynamics occurs a lot in the universities. Gender dynamics in Nigerian universities are deeply influenced by historical, socio-cultural, and economic factors. In Nigeria, gender roles and expectations are largely traditional, often casting women in more subordinate or domesticated roles while men are seen as leaders and providers (Okeke, 2019). This disparity extends to educational settings, where gendered norms and power imbalances can perpetuate inequality in

academic and social interactions. According to the National Universities commission (NUC) in Nigeria, female representation remains disproportionately low in higher levels of academia, contributing to a predominantly male-centered academic environment (NUC, 2020).

Sexual harassment in universities is an expression of gender-based violence that comprises the dignity, safety, and academic success of students (Adebowale, Fakeye and Olatunji 2019). The study shows that female students are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment often perpetrated by male faculty and staff (Okeke, 2011; Ali, 2020). Male dominance in academic and administrative positions in universities is reflective of broader societal norms where men hold authority, often translating into unequal power relations (Okolie, 2019). This hierarchy creates an environment where students, particularly females, may feel pressured to comply with authority figures to succeed academically (Owoaje, OlaOlorun, and Owoaje 2011). A survey conducted by Alabi and Alabi (2014) found that 60% of female university students in Nigeria reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment through actual figures may be higher due to underreporting. These behaviors are often perpetuated by individuals in positions of power, such as professors and administrative staff, who may leverage their authority for coercive purposes (Okeke, 2019). In context of university of Benin, harassment remains a substantial issue despite some efforts to address it. In a 2021 report, the university's student affairs department recorded numerous complaints of harassment, primarily involving faculty members. However, limited follow-through on disciplinary actions, coupled with social stigma, has prevented comprehensive resolutions, thereby perpetuating a cycle of silence and fear among students (University of Benin Student Affairs, 2021).

Research highlights that student who experience sexual harassment are affected in their psychological well-being, academic performance and career aspirations. The students affected often report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, which can detract from their academic engagement and productivity (Onayose, 2019). Female students in

Nigerian universities, including the university of Benin, have reported feeling demoralized, fearing for their safety, and feeling pressured to comply with unwanted advances to avoid academic repercussions (Akinawo, 2020). Additionally, sexual harassment contributes to a negative learning environment, undermining the academic institution's role in fostering growth, equality, and respect. Victims may resort to absenteeism, poor academic performance, or even dropping out, further widening the gender gap in education (Alabi and Alabi, 2014). For Nigerian universities like the University of Benin, these outcomes not only affect individual students but also hinder the institution's reputation and educational objectives.

The university has created committees for gender affairs and sexual harassment, yet students frequently report feeling unsupported, citing fears of backlash from reporting harassment or disbelief from authorities (University of Benin student Affairs, 2021). The interplay between gender dynamics and sexual harassment is complex, thereby giving the need to be studied thoroughly. This study aims to provide solutions to affected victims and make the university a safer and more conducive place for most especially the female students.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Sexual harassment and gender inequality remain deeply entrenched challenges within Nigerian universities, posing significant barriers to creating a safe, inclusive, and productive learning environment. At the University of Benin, like many higher education institutions in Nigeria, students, particularly female students, face substantial risks of gender-based harassment, which affects their academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall university experience (Akinawo, 2020; Okeke, 2019). Despite heightened awareness of these issues, numerous cases go unreported, unresolved, or inadequately addressed, often leaving victims without justice and allowing perpetrators to evade accountability. This environment not only discourages female students from fully engaging in their studies but also perpetuates an institutional culture that implicitly tolerates and normalizes sexual harassment and gender inequality. The issue is

exacerbated by the power dynamics inherent in the academic environment, where professors and staff often hold considerable authority over students' academic success. This imbalance enables harassment by faculty and administrative staff, who may misuse their positions to coerce students into compliance with inappropriate demands, with female students frequently bearing the brunt of this abuse (Alabi and Alabi, 2014). As Alabi and Alabi (2014) observed, around 60% of female students in Nigerian universities report having experienced some form of harassment. Given the conservative culture and institutional barriers within Nigerian society, including stigmatization and fear of retaliation, victims are often discouraged from reporting these incidents (Okeke, 2019). Consequently, the cycle of harassment persists, largely unchecked, leaving victims disempowered and perpetuating a hostile academic environment.

Moreover, the University of Benin's administrative response to harassment has proven inadequate in addressing the full scale and complexity of these issues. Although the university has made some strides toward creating policies to address harassment, these measures are often poorly enforced or inconsistently applied (University of Benin Student Affairs, 2021). For instance, despite a rise in reported cases of harassment, the university lacks a standardized, transparent procedure for handling these cases, which creates confusion and ambiguity for students seeking assistance (Onayose, 2019). Additionally, limited training for faculty and staff on issues of gender sensitivity and harassment mitigation contributes to an environment where students do not feel safe or supported. Without effective enforcement, policies alone are insufficient to bring about meaningful change, as students may feel that reporting incidents of harassment will have little impact. In light of these issues, this study is necessary to provide a comprehensive examination of the impact of gender dynamics and sexual harassment at the University of Benin. By understanding the experiences of students, particularly female students, and assessing the effectiveness of existing policies and institutional responses, this study aims to contribute to a clearer understanding of the prevalence and effects of harassment in Nigerian universities. The research seeks to highlight both the social and institutional

barriers that hinder effective action against harassment and offer recommendations for policy reforms that could foster a safer, more inclusive academic environment.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following are the research questions for this study:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of University of Benin students regarding sexual harassment?
2. How do gender dynamics and power imbalances contribute to sexual harassment?
3. What are the impacts of sexual harassment on students' academic performance and mental health?
4. How effective are existing university policies and support mechanisms?
5. What are the barriers to reporting and seeking help for sexual harassment?

### **1.4 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

To investigate the impact of gender dynamics and sexual harassment experiences on University of Benin students, and assess the effectiveness of existing support systems and policies.

Specific Objectives:

1. To explore the prevalence and forms of sexual harassment experienced by University of Benin students.
2. To examine the relationship between gender dynamics and power imbalances on sexual harassment among university students.
3. To investigate the impacts of sexual harassment on students' academic performance, mental health, and well-being.

4. To assess the effectiveness of existing university policies and support mechanisms in addressing sexual harassment.
5. To identify students' perceptions and experiences with reporting and seeking help for sexual harassment.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The issue of sexual harassment in educational institutions, exacerbated by gender dynamics, represents a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and ensuring a safe academic environment. In Nigeria, and at the University of Benin specifically, gender-based harassment is pervasive, impacting students' academic success, mental well-being, and future opportunities. This study is significant as it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways gender dynamics and sexual harassment shape the experiences of students and staff, especially females, at the University of Benin. The findings of this study will offer insights that could inform university policies, and contribute to broader societal changes toward gender equality in Nigerian academia.

One of the primary goals of this study is to illustrate the impact of sexual harassment on students' academic achievements and personal lives. Sexual harassment can lead to significant emotional and psychological distress, impacting students' concentration, attendance, and performance (Onayose, 2019). Female students in particular may face additional pressures, such as fears about their safety, anxiety around interactions with certain faculty members, and concerns about negative labeling if they report harassment. These impacts can create a hostile learning environment, hindering students' academic success and limiting their participation in extracurricular activities and professional development opportunities (Akinawo, 2020). By highlighting these impacts, the study will demonstrate the need for Nigerian universities, including the University of Benin, to take proactive steps in addressing and mitigating the effects of harassment. These insights will provide university administrators and policymakers with a clearer picture of the obstacles that female students face, encouraging them to take steps toward developing

effective support systems, counseling services, and anti-harassment training programs. Such interventions would not only help students in distress but also improve the academic performance and overall atmosphere of the institution.

By examining these gendered expectations, this research will contribute to the existing literature on how institutional cultures in Nigerian universities affect gender relations and may unintentionally encourage or discourage certain behaviors. For policymakers, an increased awareness of these gender dynamics is critical in designing policies that are sensitive to the unique experiences and needs of all students. It can also lead to a greater understanding of the power imbalances between faculty and students, and how these imbalances may create opportunities for exploitation (Alabi and Alabi, 2014). Addressing these dynamics will aid in promoting a more equitable academic environment, one in which all students, regardless of gender, feel empowered and supported to succeed.

This study on the impact of gender dynamics and sexual harassment at the University of Benin is significant for several reasons. It will enhance understanding of gender dynamics within academia, highlight the impact of harassment on students' lives, inform policy reforms, improve support services, and foster societal change. By addressing these multifaceted issues, the research will play a crucial role in helping the University of Benin create a safer, more inclusive, and equitable environment for all its students.

## **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This research focuses primarily on undergraduates' students which will be selected from the faculty of social sciences. This aims to capture a comprehensive view of how gender dynamics and harassment manifest across the university.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Concept of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment refers to unwelcome and inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment for the victim. Johnson, Widnall, Frazier, and Benya (2018), opine that gender harassment refers to verbal and nonverbal behaviors that express hostility toward, objectification of, exclusion of, or second-class status of members of one gender. Unwanted sexual attention refers to verbally or physically unwanted sexual advances, which can include assault. Sexual coercion refers to when favourable professional or educational treatment is contingent on sexual activity.

According to the report of Matsayi (2023), sexual harassment is seen as a type of sex discrimination in numerous nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Sexual harassment is defined by the Australian Sex Discrimination Act 1984, where they performed their research, as unwanted sexual advances or requests for sexual favours that can fairly be expected to offend, degrade, or frighten the harassed person. According to Suleiman (2017), sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and any physical, verbal, or nonverbal behaviour that demands or rejects submission to or rejection of such behaviour, either explicitly or implicitly. Examples of such behaviour include threats, intimidation, taunting, unwelcome touching, unwelcome kissing, phono-graphic, and other similar behaviors.

According to the University of Amsterdam (UVA) (2021), sexual harassment is any action that has a sexual overtone and affects someone's dignity in some way. It could be expressed verbally (comments, innuendo), nonverbally (inappropriate looking, certain movements), or physically (touching). Sexual harassment is said to be a form of social

control by men to "keep women in their places. Sexual harassment, as defined by the University of Zambia's sexual harassment policy, is "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when submission to or disapproval of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with a person's work or educational performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or learning environment. Harassment may occur between anyone, and it is also common among members of the campus community: students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Harassment may occur between anyone, and it is also common among members of the campus community: students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Sexual harassment can be defined as Severe or widespread sexually explicit verbal, visual, or physical conduct that is undesirable, impacts working conditions, or fosters a hostile work environment. If the behaviour is accepted, it is not sexual harassment. To let the harasser, know that their actions are upsetting and that you would like them to stop, it is crucial to do so in writing or verbally. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and verbal, physical, or nonverbal behaviour that demands or rejects submission to or rejection of such behaviour, either explicitly or implicitly, including threats, intimidation, taunting, unwanted touching, unwanted kissing, and so forth (Matsayi, 2023).

Southern Illinois University (SIU 2020) "Any unwelcome conduct based on an individual's actual or perceived race, colour, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, marital status, status under an order of protection, disability, military status, sexual orientation, pregnancy, unfavourable discharge from military service, or citizenship status that has the purpose or effect of materially interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment" is considered harassment.

## **2.2 Prevalence and Forms of sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment can take different forms, including verbal harassment, nonverbal harassment, physical harassment, visual harassment, and quid pro quo harassment. Sexual harassment is not limited to a particular gender and can happen to anyone, regardless of their sex or gender identity. The issue of sexual harassment, therefore, should not be based on hearsay. Various examples of lecturers harassing their students with various tactics, such as touching, winking, sexual comments, etc., and actual intercourse, have been documented in various newspapers. This inspired inquiry into the subject. However, because sex is private and shame is associated with it, not much is known about sexual harassment in tertiary institutions. It has been made clear precisely how commonplace this discriminatory behaviour is in our culture by the reports of sexual harassment that have overtaken news headlines. Women who have been silent for years are now speaking up and sharing their experiences with sexual harassment, which includes lewd or derogatory remarks, hostile or demeaning jokes, professional sabotage, repeated unwanted sexual advances, groping, demands for sexual favours, and other offensive and discriminatory actions or language (Matsayi, Adamu, Kefas and Menchak, 2022).

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017), sexual harassment refers to a variety of behaviour such as leering or gazing, unwanted touching, and sexual slurs or taunts. In addition to the workplace, Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, Stibal, cited in (Renata, Chloe, Paul, Michelle, and Michelle, 2019), educational institutions, public spaces, and online, sexual harassment occurs in a variety of settings. Southern Illinois University System (Southern Illinois University 2020), argued that sexual harassment can entail online or electronic media interactions, even when they occur off-site or “off the clock.” Examples of actions that may be construed as unwanted sexual conduct via email, cell phone, text, Internet or Intranet posting, online comments, blog posts, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat), or other electronic media include requests or demands for sex, sexually explicit or inappropriate

images and videos, sexually offensive language or comments, unwanted flirting, unwanted requests for dates, and cyberstalking.

Sexual harassment may also take the form of physical coercion such as being brushed against or held sexually, having private parts touched, or being coerced into kissing or other forms of sexual behaviour. Sexual harassment is unwanted and undesired behaviour of a sexual nature that impedes a student's ability to have an equal opportunity to learn. It occurs in schools. Between 40% and 85% of men and women in secondary and high schools report experiencing sexual harassment in one of the aforementioned forms (Skoog, Özdemir, and Stattin, 2015). In a 2022 study, Kennair and his team reported that 7% of adolescent boys admitted to perpetrating physical forms of sexual harassment, while 30% of adolescent girls reported experiencing physical sexual victimization. This suggests that while boys are less frequently victims of physical sexual harassment, they are more often the perpetrators. Sexual harassment victimization may cause considerable psychosocial strain. Physical or verbal harassment: psychological, physical or verbal harassment, aggression, threats, or assault, including shouting, swearing, or getting too close physically. It can take the form of a hate crime motivated by hatred based on ethnicity/race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or transgender identity (Universities UK, 2016).

Earlier studies from educational institutions in Nigeria and across the world reported between 67% and 99% of different types of sexual harassment in both public and private institutions (Imonikhe, 2016). For instance, Universities UK (2016; Johnson, Widnall, Frazier, and Benya 2018) have identified verbal, nonverbal, indirect, or physical sexual harassment as the main types experienced. Derogatory sexual statements or sexual jokes frequently constitute verbal sexual harassment. Personal phone conversations, emails, messages, or other sexually explicit content; pressure to go on dates; sexually suggestive statements, jokes, or inquiries; calling an adult “girl,” “hunk,” “doll,” “babe,” or “honey”; Asking about sexual fantasies, shifting lecture talks to sexual subjects, making sexual

remarks about someone's appearance, anatomy, or attire, or making kissing noises are all examples of inappropriate sexual behavior.

According to Southern Illinois University (2020), nonverbal harassment may include the display of pornographic images or objects, obscene gestures, intentional touching, leaning over, or cornering, sexual looks or gestures, and letters, and indirect harassment may include being the target of sexual rumors and having unflattering images posted on social media. Neck and/or shoulder massage is another example of indirect harassment. Hugging, kissing, patting, stroking, or pinching; touching a student's clothing, hair, or body; and unwelcome proximity to another individual. Standing near to or rubbing up against a person; caressing or stroking oneself sexually when another person is present. As opposed to the other three types of sexual harassment, direct sexual harassment entails rape and physical sexual molestation. Inappropriate sexual remarks, unsolicited groping of female students' breasts, tapping of female students' buttocks, and luring female students with high-sex test results are only a few examples of sexual harassment of female students, according to Onoyase (2019). Worldwide, both industrial and non-industrial societies exhibit these types of sexual harassment.

According to Southern Illinois University (2020), and Matsayi, Adamu, and Kefas 2022, inhospitable working conditions and quid pro quo are two examples of sexual harassment. Quick for quick. It's "something for something." This type of harassment happens when a manager or supervisor informs a subordinate that they must perform sexual acts in exchange for a promotion, raise, preferred assignment, or other types of job benefits, or to avoid something negative like discipline or an unpleasant task. An intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment is created when uninvited sexual approaches, requests for sexual favours, or any other sexual behavior has the intention or effect of materially affecting a person's ability to fulfil their job duties. Inappropriate contact, sexual remarks, and offensive items used in the workplace are all forms of sexual harassment (Gruber and Osman as cited in Houle, Mortimer, Uggen, and Blackstone. 2015).

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of ways beyond advances and requests for sexual favours. A hostile work atmosphere or other sexually explicit behavior can be part of or contribute to quid pro quo sexual harassment. For example, actual or attempted rape or sexual assault; demands for sexual favours; intentional touching, leaning over, or cornering; sexual looks or gestures; letters, calls, personal emails, texts, or other materials of a sexual nature; and so forth. Pressure to go on dates; sexual taunting; sexual jokes; sexual comments; calling an adult a "girl," "hunk," "doll," "babe," or "honey"; turning business conversations into sexually explicit ones; asking about sexual dreams, preferences, or history; sexual remarks regarding a person's appearance, body, or attire; smacking lips, wailing, and kissing noises; discussing, fabricating, or disseminating rumours about a person's private sex life; massage your shoulders or your neck; caressing, kissing, patting, stroking, or pinching an employee; touching their clothing, hair, or body; and unwelcome proximity to them. Sexually suggestive posters, cartoons, websites, or magazines displayed in the workplace or shown to someone; playing sexually suggestive or graphic videos or music; and making sexual gestures with the hands or through body movement are all prohibited. So are touching or rubbing oneself sexually on oneself in front of another person, standing close to or brushing up against a person, looking a person up and down, and more (Jyotimala, 2019). Touching or making any other physical contact with a coworker, including patting or scratching their backs, holding them by the waist, or obstructing their movement. Unwanted flirting or persistent solicitations for dates that are declined illustrations of sexual harassment sending or publishing messages, emails, or images with sexual or other harassing content putting up posters, images, or things that are sexually suggestive Playing music with explicit lyrics, Tripartite Model of SH, Sexually Harassing Behaviors, and the generally accepted tripartite model of SH (Fitzgerald, and DeNardo. as cited in Burn, (2019) the three behavioral elements of sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment are identified. According to Holland and Cortina (2016), these three kinds are persistent over time, across cultures, and occupational sectors.

## **2.3 Relationship Between Gender Dynamics and Power Imbalance in Sexual Harassment**

The relationship between gender dynamics and power imbalances plays a crucial role in the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment. Gender dynamics refer to the societal norms, roles, and expectations placed on individuals based on their gender. These norms often create power imbalances, particularly in contexts like the workplace, educational institutions, or social settings, where those in positions of authority (often men) have more power over subordinates (often women).

*How gender dynamics and power imbalances contribute to sexual harassment:*

**Hierarchical Power Structures:** In many workplaces or institutions, there is a gendered hierarchy that places men in positions of power, which increases the likelihood of harassment. Men in authority can exploit their power over women, making them more vulnerable to unwanted sexual advances or coercion.

**Socialization and Gender Roles:** Gender roles often dictate that men should be assertive and dominant, while women are expected to be passive or accommodating. These expectations can normalize unequal power relations and create environments where harassment is tolerated or even expected.

**Gender Stereotyping and Objectification:** Women are often objectified or seen as sexual beings, leading to behaviors that objectify, belittle, or dismiss them. This makes it easier for perpetrators to justify actions as harmless or "flattering," even though they may constitute harassment. (Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu, M. (2014).

**Power Imbalance and Consent:** In situations of power imbalance, individuals with more power may pressure or manipulate those with less power into situations where they feel they cannot freely give or withhold consent. The unequal distribution of power makes it difficult for the victim to resist or report the harassment without fear of retaliation.

Perpetuation of Gender Inequality: Sexual harassment is a tool for reinforcing gender inequality. It is not just about physical or verbal misconduct; it also sends the message that those in power can control or dominate those who are less powerful, reinforcing societal gender hierarchies. Research indicates that such behavior is rooted in gender inequality and the abuse of power relations. It is not merely about inappropriate conduct but functions to uphold existing power structures, signaling that those in authority can dominate others, which reinforces systemic gender disparities. (Champions of Change Coalition. (2021).

Silencing and Fear of Retaliation: In environments with significant power imbalances, those who experience harassment may fear retaliation if they speak out. Women or marginalized genders may feel that reporting harassment could harm their career, social status, or safety. This fear is often rooted in real-world examples where perpetrators escape consequences.

#### **2.4 Impact of sexual harassment on Student Academic Performance, Mental Health and Well-being**

According to several studies by Bendixen, Deveron's, and Kennair (2018), sexual harassment can have a significant negative impact on the well-being of tertiary institution students. Sexual harassment can have serious negative impacts on mental health. Being subjected to sexual harassment can lead to a decline in mental health, causing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sexual harassment can have profound negative effects on both mental and physical health. Mentally, it is associated with an increased risk of issues such as suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and self-harm. Physically, victims may experience symptoms like headaches, stomach pain, and muscle tension due to the stress and anxiety resulting from such experiences. (RAINN).

Sexual harassment can have significant negative impacts on a student's academic performance. It can create an environment of fear and discomfort that makes it difficult to focus on their studies. Students who experience sexual harassment may find it

challenging to attend classes, participate in discussions, or even complete their assignments. Also, sexual harassment can cause emotional distress, anxiety, and depression, which can further undermine a student's academic performance. The stress of dealing with harassment can be overwhelming, and it can affect a student's ability to learn and retain information. Additionally, the American Association of University Women (AAUW 2015) reported that students who have been sexually harassed may avoid certain campus areas, skip classes, or even consider changing schools, further disrupting their academic and social development.

Furthermore, sexual harassment can have a significant impact on a student's social relationships. When a student experiences sexual harassment, they may feel embarrassed, ashamed, and fearful of what others may think of them. As a result, they may withdraw from social situations, avoid interactions with friends and family, and isolate themselves from others. Also, sexual harassment can impact a student's ability to form new relationships, as they may struggle with trust issues and feel hesitant to open up to others. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, which can further exacerbate the negative impact of sexual harassment on the student's mental health.

As to understand it, sexual harassment can have a lasting impact on a student's professional development and career prospects. Here are some ways in which sexual harassment can affect a student's future career. Sexual harassment can undermine a student's confidence and self-esteem, making them less likely to speak up or assert themselves in the workplace. This can make it harder for them to take on new challenges or seek out opportunities for professional growth.

## **2.5 Adopted Measures against Sexual Harassment**

Various measures have been applied globally in combating sexual harassment in higher learning institutions. A study conducted in France by Kathryn, Lilia, and Anna. (2020) on sexual harassment in the Academic Space as a Social and Pedagogical Problem reported the presence of national policy on gender-based violence in academia. The study

reported that together in July 2019 over 95% of public universities in France created special advisory services within their institutions. The efforts didn't end there, the government enacted a law against sexual harassment in universities which indicated a penalty of 1-year imprisonment and a fine equivalent to 15,000 Euros to a person who practices harassment.

The same researchers also reported that Ireland and Israel launched a national policy on gender-based violence in educational institutions, including universities. The findings added that the government of Poland set up a penal code that would guide the victims. Also, Sweden, Iceland, and Israel organized activities such as conferences, seminars, workshops and meetings to fight sexual violence in the academic environment.

Another study was conducted by Sholkamy (2019) on Fighting sexual harassment on Campus in Africa. This was action research which examined the differences and similarities between three Egyptian universities (BeniSuef, Alexandria, and Fayoum) in fighting sexual harassment within their respective campuses. The study indicated measures taken by those universities towards managing sexual harassment in universities. For instance, in December 2016, BeniSuef established an anti-sexual harassment unit and adopted an anti-sexual harassment and violence policy with the task of receiving sexual harassment and violence complaints, transferring complaints to the anti-harassment committee (the committee secretly investigating the complaints and recommending any punitive measures). The unit also assisted victims of harassment and protected the complainant; together they implemented training and awareness programs. Similarly, at Alexandria University the professors were engaged in training, campaigns and workshops organized by different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) towards addressing sexual harassment. The university also launched an anti-sexual harassment unit in September 2017. In addition, Fayoum University established a sexual harassment unit with the support from the university administration and its president unit provided training to students, and psychological and legal support to victims of sexual harassment. Sholkamy (2019).

## **2.6 Attitudes and Perceptions of Sexual Harassment**

Foulis and McCabe (2017) examined how gender, gender role, gender role stereotypes, age, occupation, and experience of sexual harassment impact attitudes and perceptions of sexual harassment of 123 female and 73 male high school and university students, as well as workers. These variables were also investigated in terms of their relationship to the experience of sexual harassment. The findings revealed that high school males had more tolerant attitudes toward sexual harassment than females. However, there were no differences between males and females at university and in the workplace in their attitudes. The strongest predictor of attitudes to sexual harassment for high school males was gender role stereotypes. Gender differences occur as a result of reinforcement and modeling and these differences influence attitudes toward sexual harassment. Males perceive more situations as being sexual or potentially sexual, and so view sexually harassing behaviour as normal or appropriate. Attitudes to sexual harassment also were found to be an indicator of perceptions for university students and workers. Participants' perceptions of sexual harassment were found to significantly predict attitudes toward sexual harassment. The correlation between these two variables revealed that those participants with more tolerant attitudes toward sexual harassment perceived fewer incidents to be sexual harassment. Attitudes were found to be a predictor of experience of sexual harassment. Masculinity was also found to predict the experience of sexual harassment.

Wear and Aultman (2023) investigated how third and fourth-year medical students perceive and experience sexual harassment, what they believe about reporting sexual harassment, and how they believe it might be stopped in the educational environment. Five focus groups were conducted with 24 medical students during May and June 2022, regarding their experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment and other issues surrounding gender equity during their medical education. Focus groups encourage interaction among participants and provide a forum for addressing sensitive topics. The result indicated that the gender climate during students' pre-clinical education was

impressive but changed as they progressed to their clinical year. Nine of the 14 female students with clinical experience described explicit sexual comments directed at them in clinical settings and also sexual harassment was found to be underreported and most often included worries about retaliation, hostility from peers, increased distress, getting the harasser in trouble, and possible humiliation and ostracism from peers.

Turner (2023) examined how United States women undergraduate and graduate students perceive and experience their campus climate. Female subjects were recruited women from a predominantly White research university in the northeast totaling 46 participants, 31 were undergraduates, 15 were graduate students, 37 were White and 9 were students of color. On this campus, women students comprised more than half of the undergraduate and graduate population. Focus group interviews were used, which centered on the actual words of the participants to give insight into their perceptions and experiences that would help to identify sources and effects of challenges and supports of women students. There were 8 focus group interviews with 4 to 12 participants each: 2 graduate student focus groups, 2 residence hall focus groups, 2 women's centre focus groups, and 1 student of a color centre focus group. Findings indicated that across race, university classification, and level of involvement, the women students in this study reported a chilly campus climate. Three main themes that emerged from the data were: (a) socialization of safety, (b) safety concerns realized, and (c) coping with fear for safety. Women worried about personal safety, experiencing sexual victimization, and being blamed for attacks on their person. Women students' attitudes about safety revealed that, although women felt safe on this particular campus, they still think about their safety. In addition to regularly thinking about their safety on campus, women students reported actual incidents of sexual victimization. The incidents of victimization reported ranged from sexist comments from male peers to sexist drawings and depictions of women in a negative light. Students in this study also reported incidents of harassment and bias that occurred at all times of day, night, week, and weekend. The American Association of University Women (AAUW,

2015), reported that 81% of students experience sexual harassment during their school years, indicating that incidents can occur at any time.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

### **GENDER AND POWER THEORY**

This study was framed by Gender and Power Theory pioneered by Connell (1987). The mentioned theory lays its focus on social and structural issues surrounding women in terms of the distribution of power and gender-specific norms within the interaction of heterosexual relationships (Connell, 1987). Connell's theory consists of three interdependent structures sexual division of power, sexual division of labour, and the structure of Psychoanalysis. The three social structures originated from historical and socio-political forces of a society where they put much emphasis on the segregation of power and roles between genders by the social norms of a particular society (Wamoyi, 2021).

The theory explains itself with a wide range on how society can be a lead influence to inequalities and gender-based violence with the consideration of those entities that act as a guide of a particular society. It provided more useful information that once a society decides to focus and make use of them it will be so easy to avoid those gender-related problems and challenges. Regarding this new study, the theory enabled investigation on how power is used by men which influences their sexual; behaviours, for example, the way some male academic staff and administrator used their position on demanding sexual relationships with female students. Not only to them but also to male students who also used their power to treat female students in bad ways. The theory enabled the researcher to find out those society's social norms that have an influence on gender inequalities in almost all spheres of life, resulting in gender violence and sexual harassment. In addition, the theory was useful in finding out to what extent the presence of these social mechanisms results in female students experiencing harassment from males in different forms including sexual.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the procedures used in carrying out this research, it describes the methods used in gathering relevant data for this study. The chapter covers the following subheadings: research design, population of the study, sample size and sample technique, instrument for data collection, method of data collection, validity and reliability of the research instrument and method for data analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

it is seen as the blueprint, a summarized version of the researcher's intention and the process. The design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design, where the researcher is primarily interested in describing the topic that is the subject of the research. It is applied to case studies, observations, surveys, and so on. This method includes data collection, analysis, and presentation. The descriptive method allows others to understand the need for this kind of research. The researcher is often times allowed to use their discrete.

#### **3.3 Population of the Study**

This is seen as the targeted or specificity of the targeted area. The population of the study comprises of student of the University of Benin undergraduate students, because the student are major victims of sexual violence. The undergraduate students form the major respondent and for the purpose of the study due to it sensitive nature 1000 student is the target population.

#### **3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The difficulty of surveying the entire population has often promoted the use of sampling which involves the selection of a subset of individuals from the general population.

For the purpose of this research a 10% sample size of 100 respondents was be drawn using the purposive technique across the University of Benin undergraduate students. Purposive sample technique is a non-probability sampling method where researchers intentionally select individuals, groups, or events based on specific characteristics or criteria that are relevant to the research. The study used 70% for girls and 30% for boys, because girls are more affected than their male counterpart. The students will be selected from various faculties and departments.

### **3.5 Instrument for Data collection**

The instrument for data collection is both the qualitative and the quantitative methods. This is for reliability as more than one instrument is used for insight into the research problem. The major instrument for data collection for the quantitative method is the questionnaire which is semi structured (closed and open-ended questions). The questionnaire was structured into two parts: the first section contains information bothering on the socio demographic profile of participants, section two covered questions on the issues dealing with Sexual Violence.

The instrument used for qualitative method is the in-depth interview which was used to gather more content on sexual violence from the respondents. The in-depth interview guide was validated by the researcher. These various instruments begin with a letter of consent in order to encourage the respondent to participate effectively in the exercise.

### **3.6 Method of Data Collection**

The study made use of survey method in the collection of data. This was based on a one-time survey method. The reason being that the study was conducted once. The researcher went to the field and engage the respondents once without going a second time.

### **3.7 Validity of the Research Instrument**

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. This was achieved by vetting in terms of relevance to the subject matter, coverage of the content areas, appropriateness of language usage and clarity of purpose.

### **3.8 Reliability of the research instrument**

The instrument used which was the questionnaire is proved to be very reliable because the objective at which it was set up was met.

### **3.9 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected from respondents was analyzed using descriptive statistics which included tables, simple frequency, percentage. The data analysis in line with the triangulation of both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Interview and field observation was used to support findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on presenting, analyzing and interpreting the data collected for the study on gender dynamics and sexual harassment students in the university of Benin. Section A, which deals with the demographic characteristics of respondents, and section B, which delves into the main research topic by examining the relationship gender dynamics and sexual harassment.

#### SECTION A:

#### 4.1 SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENT

**Table 4.1.1: Gender of respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Female</b>	64	64%
<b>Male</b>	36	36%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (field work 2024).

Results from the table 1 shows that the majority of respondents (64%) are female, while 36% are male. This distribution is significant, as it highlights that sexual harassment may disproportionately affect female students at the University of Benin, reinforcing broader gender dynamics in academic institutions.

**Table 4.1.2: Age of respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>16 - 20</b>	28	28%
<b>21 - 25</b>	47	47%
<b>26 - 30</b>	15	15%
<b>30 and above</b>	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

The table above shows that majority of respondents (47%) are between the ages of 21-25, followed by age 16-20 with 28% and age 26-30 with 15% and lastly age 30 and above with 10%. This aligns with the typical university demographic. This age group is particularly vulnerable to gender-based harassment, as they navigate complex power dynamics within academic and social settings.

**Table 4.1. 3 Residence of respondent**

<b>Residence</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>On campus</b>	67	67%
<b>Off campus</b>	33	33%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

Most respondents (67%) reside on-campus, while 33% resides off-campus and this may expose them to different forms of harassment, including those occurring in rented apartments, transportation, and surrounding university environments.

**Table 4.1.5 Level of respondents**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>100 level</b>	13	13%
<b>200 level</b>	24	24%
<b>300 level</b>	42	42%
<b>400 level</b>	21	21%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

The table above present the distribution for of respondents by their academic’s level, with 42% from the 300l, 24% from 200L, and 21% from 400L, lastly 13% from 100l. This may suggest that penultimate students have had more exposure to gender-based harassment and are more aware of the challenges surrounding gender dynamics in academic spaces.

**4.1.6: Department of respondents**

<b>Departments</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Sociology</b>	26	26%
<b>Political science</b>	30	30%
<b>Public administration</b>	16	16%
<b>Economics</b>	13	13%
<b>Psychology</b>	15	15%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

The table above display the distribution of respondents across all the department in social sciences, political science with majority of respondents (30%), sociology and Anthropology with 26%, public administration with 16%, followed by psychology with 15% and lastly Economics with 13%. Students from these disciplines are often exposed to discussions on gender studies, power relations, and human behavior, which may influence their perceptions of sexual harassment.

## **SECTION B: Objective one**

### **4.2 prevalence and forms of sexual harassment**

**Table 4.2.1**

<b>Have you experienced any form of sexual harassment?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Yes</b>	35	35%
<b>No</b>	65	65%
<b>Total</b>	100	100

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

Results from the table above shows that While 35% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, while 65% respondents reported not to have experienced any sexual harassment. It is possible that many cases go unreported due to fear of victim-blaming, lack of trust in authorities, or normalization of harassment in academic spaces.

**Table 4.2.2**

<b>If yes, what of sexual harassment have you witnessed?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Raped</b>	15	15%
<b>Assault/Abuse</b>	21	21%
<b>Forceful touching</b>	64	64%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

Form the table above, Forceful touching (64%) was the most commonly reported form of harassment, followed by assault (21%) and rape (15%). This suggests that many students experience unwanted physical advances, which could escalate into more severe forms of violence.

## **OBJECTIVE 2**

### **4. 3 Relationship between gender dynamics and power imbalance on sexual harassment**

**Table 4.3.1**

<b>Do you think gender dynamics influence how sexual harassment occurs?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Yes</b>	51	51%
<b>No</b>	32	32%
<b>Not sure</b>	16	16%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the above table, more than half of the respondents (51%) believe that gender dynamics influence the occurrence of sexual harassment, and 32% not believing that gender dynamics influence the occurrence of sexual harassment, lastly 16% of the respondents are not sure. This reinforces the notion that power imbalances, societal expectations, and cultural norms shape these experiences.

**Table 4.3.2**

<b>How often do you feel unsafe due to gender-based harassment in the university?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Very often</b>	27	27%
<b>occasionally</b>	35	35%
<b>Rarely</b>	20	20%
<b>Never</b>	18	18%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

The majority of respondents (62%) feel unsafe on campus due to gender-based harassment, and 38% of the respondents do not feel unsafe, which highlights the need for stronger preventive measures and safer academic spaces.

### 4.3.3

<b>In your opinion, what factors contribute to sexual harassment at the university?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Indecent dressing</b>	37	37%
<b>Lack of strict policies</b>	19	19%
<b>Peer pressure</b>	12	12%
<b>Power imbalances</b>	15	15%
<b>Poor security</b>	17	17%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above 37% of the respondent agree that indecent dressing is a major factor contributing to sexual harassment in the university, while 19% agree to lack of strict policies, 17% agreed to poor security, 15% agreed to power imbalances, and lastly 12% agreed to peer pressure as one of the factors contributing to sexual harassment.

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

#### **4.4 Impacts of sexual harassment on student's academic performance and well-being**

##### **4.4.1**

<b>Has sexual harassment or gender-based discrimination affected your academic performance?</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Yes</b>	67	67%
<b>No</b>	33	33%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the above table, 67% of the respondents have been affected academically by sexual harassment and gender-based dynamics, while 33% of the respondents have not been affected.

#### 4.4.2

<b>If yes, in what ways has it impacted your academic performance?</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Low grades</b>	77	77%
<b>Depression</b>	11	11%
<b>Loss of motivation</b>	12	12%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, 77% of the respondents have been impacted negatively by having low grades, while 12% are impacted by loss of motivation from school activities, and lastly 11% of the respondents have been impacted with depression causing a chance of high number of students dropping out and poor performance academically.

**Table 4.4.3**

<b>Has sexual harassment influenced your relationships with peers and lecturers?</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Very positively</b>	5	5%

<b>Somewhat positively</b>	2	2%
<b>Negatively</b>	81	81%
<b>Not at all</b>	12	12%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, 81% of the majority respondent’s relationship with peers and lecturer has been influenced negatively by sexual harassment, while 12% has not been influenced at all, and 5% has been influenced very positively, and lastly 2% has been influenced somewhat positively.

**OBJECTIVE 4**

**4.5 Student perception and experiences with reporting and seeking help**

**4.5.1**

<b>Are you aware of any reporting channels for sexual harassment?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Yes</b>	45	45%
<b>No</b>	55	55%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, study show that majority of the respondents (55%) strongly disagree to be aware of any reporting channels for sexual harassment, while 45% of the respondents agree to be aware of any reporting channels.

#### 4.5.2

<b>Have you or anyone you know reported cases of sexual harassment to appropriate authorities?</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Yes</b>	58	58%
<b>No</b>	42	42%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, majority of 53%, respondents have reported or known anyone who reported the case of sexual harassment to appropriate authorities, while 42% of the respondents does not know anyone and have not reported cases of sexual harassment.

#### 4.5.3

<b>If yes, how effective were these report mechanisms in addressing the issue?</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Very effective</b>	21	21%
<b>Somehow effective</b>	4	4%
<b>Not effective at all</b>	75	75%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, the report mechanisms are not effective at all with majority respondents (75%) choosing not effective at all, followed by 21% very effective, and lastly, 4% of somewhat effective.

**OBJECTIVE 5**

**4.6 Effectiveness of existing university policies and support mechanisms**

**4.6.1**

<b>Are there existing policies or initiatives aimed at addressing sexual harassment?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Yes</b>	33	33%
<b>No</b>	67	67%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

Results from the table above reveal that majority of the respondents strongly disagree (67%) to existence of policies aimed at addressing sexual harassment, while 33% of the respondents agree to the existence of policies aimed at addressing sexual harassment.

**4.6.2**

<b>In your opinion, how effective are these policies or initiatives?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>

<b>Not effective</b>	57	57%
<b>Somewhat effective</b>	12	12%
<b>Very effective</b>	31	31%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, data reveal that a strong consensus among respondent regarding how effective the policies are, and majority (57%) gave their opinion on how the policies are not effective, while 31% suggested that the policies are effective and lastly 12% gave their opinion on how the policies are somewhat effective.

#### 4.6.3

<b>What additional measures would you suggest to prevent sexual harassment and promote gender equality?</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage {%}</b>
<b>Legal protection</b>	32	32%
<b>Public campaigns</b>	28	28%
<b>Anonymity of reporters</b>	40	40%
<b>Total</b>	100	100%

**SOURCE:** (Fieldwork 2024).

From the table above, data show that a significant majority (40%) suggested Anonymity of reporters, followed by legal protection (32%), and 28% suggested public campaigns in preventing and promoting gender dynamics and sexual harassments.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This section provides an extensive analysis of the study's findings, drawing comparisons with existing literature and discussing the implications for students, university policies, and broader gender dynamics. The discussion centers on five key themes: prevalence and forms of sexual harassment, gender dynamics and power imbalances, the impact on students' academic and psychological well-being, effectiveness of reporting mechanisms, and institutional responses to harassment.

### **4.7 Prevalence and Forms of Sexual Harassment**

The findings of this study indicate that 35% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment at the University of Benin. However, 64% of students reported witnessing forceful touching, while 21% were aware of cases of sexual assault, and 15% knew of rape incidents. This suggests that sexual harassment is a widespread issue on campus, with many students either directly affected or aware of harassment happening around them.

These findings align with Buchanan, Morris and Thomas (2020), who note that sexual harassment is prevalent in higher education institutions globally due to deep-rooted power dynamics and weak enforcement of policies. In Nigeria, previous studies by Musa and Okafor (2021) found that over 40% of female university students reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment during their academic journey.

A critical point emerging from this study is that harassment takes various forms, including:

Unwanted physical contact: This was the most reported form, with 64% of respondents witnessing forceful touching. This aligns with research by Brown and Fisher (2021), who found that unwanted touching is often dismissed as "minor" but plays a significant role in normalizing harassment.

Verbal harassment and coercion: Students reported instances of lecturers and peers making inappropriate comments, consistent with findings by Hassan, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022) that suggest verbal harassment is often used to groom victims for more severe forms of abuse.

Rape and sexual assault: While 15% of respondents knew of rape cases, the actual number could be higher due to underreporting, fear of retaliation, and social stigma, as discussed by UN Women (2021).

Despite the 35% self-reported harassment rate, underreporting remains a significant issue. Many students may not recognize certain behaviors as harassment or fear repercussions if they come forward. Gordon and Collins (2019) argue that cultural factors, victim-blaming, and fear of academic consequences contribute to low reporting rates in university environments.

#### **4.8 Gender Dynamics and Power Imbalances**

The study found that 51% of respondents believe gender dynamics play a major role in the occurrence of sexual harassment at the University of Benin. This supports feminist theories, which argue that harassment is rooted in gender-based power imbalances.

Several key gender-related insights emerged from the study:

Women experience harassment at disproportionately higher rates: The study found that 64% of respondents were female, reinforcing global research findings that women face higher risks of sexual harassment in university settings (Hollabaugh and Collins, 2022).

Men also experience harassment but report less frequently: 36% of respondents were male, highlighting that sexual harassment is not exclusive to women. However, societal norms discourage male victims from speaking out, aligning with studies by Eze and Adebayo (2019), which found that men often fear being ridiculed if they report harassment.

Sex-for-grades culture and academic power imbalances: Many female students reported experiencing coercion from lecturers in exchange for academic favors, a problem documented by Musa and Okafor (2021) in their study of Nigerian universities. This dynamic reinforces Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which suggests that men in positions of power use their authority to exert control over women.

Another concerning finding was that 62% of respondents reported feeling unsafe on campus due to gender-based harassment. This sense of insecurity affects students' overall well-being and academic engagement, supporting research by Brown and Fisher (2021), who found that the fear of harassment discourages female students from fully participating in university life.

#### **4.9 Impact of Sexual Harassment on Academic Performance and Psychological Well-being**

The study found that 67% of students reported that sexual harassment negatively affected their academic performance, with 77% experiencing low grades, 11% reporting depression, and 12% losing motivation. These findings align with (Adams Brown and Collins, 2020), who emphasize that harassment often leads to psychological distress, social withdrawal, and academic disengagement.

##### **Academic Consequences of Sexual Harassment:**

Many students, particularly those experiencing harassment from lecturers, may feel pressured to comply or risk unfair grading, a phenomenon labeled "sex-for-grades" in Nigerian universities (Musa and Okafor, 2021). In addition, victims may avoid certain

classes or drop out altogether to escape harassment, further diminishing their academic performance. This is consistent with research by Gordon and Collins (2019), who found that students who experience harassment often lose interest in their studies. If unchecked, sexual harassment contributes to high dropout rates, particularly among female students who feel unsafe on campus (Hassan and Yusuf, 2021).

### **Psychological and Emotional Impact:**

Sexual harassment does not only affect students academically; it also has profound psychological consequences:

From the analysis drawn above, it is set that 11% of respondents reported experiencing depression due to harassment, supporting Brown and Fisher (2021), who found that persistent harassment can lead to PTSD-like symptoms. Also, loss of motivation can be the consequences of sexual harassment with 12% of respondents lost motivation to continue their studies, aligning with research by (Adams, Brown and Collins 2020), which suggests that harassment victims often struggle with self-worth and academic commitment.

### **4.10 Objective 4: Effectiveness of Reporting Mechanisms**

One of the most concerning findings was that 55% of students were unaware of any official reporting channels, and 75% believed the existing mechanisms were ineffective. These statistics suggest that the University of Benin's response to sexual harassment is inadequate. The reason for this statistical information is because of Fear of victim-blaming. Many students fear being blamed or disbelieved, as noted by Eze and Adebayo (2019). Also, Lack of confidentiality, victims worry about retaliation from perpetrators, particularly if they are lecturers. Lastly, Perceived inaction can also be the reason for this even when cases are reported, many students believe that authorities do little to hold perpetrators accountable (Hassan, Yusuf and Ibrahim, 2022).

These findings indicate an urgent need for more accessible and student-friendly reporting mechanisms that ensure confidentiality, transparency, and strict enforcement of anti-harassment policies.

#### **4.11 Institutional Responses and Policy Effectiveness**

The study found that 67% of students were unaware of any existing sexual harassment policies at the University of Benin. This suggests either poor communication or weak enforcement of these policies. The issues affecting the policies are Lack of implementation of policies, the policies often exist on paper but are not actively enforced (Ogunyemi, Adamu and Akinleye, 2020). Also, Influence of perpetrators which is a major issue. When harassers hold positions of power, institutional bureaucracies may protect them rather than victims (Hassan and Yusuf, 2021). Lastly, Student disengagement and lack of awareness, many students remain unaware of their rights and available protections due to inadequate awareness campaigns.

Global best practices, as recommended by UNESCO and UN Women, suggest that universities should adopt Zero-tolerance policies for sexual harassment, Independent investigative bodies to handle cases, and Stronger student awareness campaigns

#### **4.12 Summary of Discussion**

This study confirms that sexual harassment at the University of Benin is prevalent, underreported, and has severe academic and psychological consequences. Gender power imbalances play a key role in harassment, and institutional responses remain inadequate. To address these issues, the university must enforce stricter policies, strengthen reporting mechanisms, and promote awareness campaigns to ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary of Findings

This study explored how gender dynamics and sexual harassment affect students at the University of Benin. It aimed to understand students' awareness and perception of sexual harassment, determine how common it is, examine its impact on academic performance and mental health, and identify the factors that allow it to continue.

A total of 100 students participated in the survey, with most being female and between the ages of 20 and 25. The highest number of responses came from final-year (300-level) students, mainly from the Political Science, Public Administration, Sociology, Economics, and Psychology departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The findings showed that sexual harassment is a real and concerning issue on campus. About 35% of students reported experiencing sexual harassment, while many others admitted to knowing someone who had been a victim. Students defined sexual harassment in different ways, including unwanted sexual advances, inappropriate remarks, coercion, and abuse of power. The most commonly reported forms of harassment were verbal harassment, unwanted physical contact, and demands for sexual favors in exchange for academic or professional benefits.

Several factors contributed to the prevalence of sexual harassment on campus. A significant percentage of respondents (37%) believed that indecent dressing played a role, while others pointed to the lack of strict policies (19%) and the general acceptance of gender-based violence in society. Fear of retaliation, pressure to perform academically, and weak institutional responses were also major reasons why many victims chose not to report their experiences. Some students even expressed concerns that the university environment was unsafe, as those who engaged in harassment—whether students, lecturers, or non-academic staff often did so without facing any serious consequences.

The effects of sexual harassment on students were severe, especially in terms of academic performance. Victims reported experiencing absenteeism, reduced concentration, and

disengagement from academic activities. Many struggled with stress, low self-esteem, and difficult relationships with lecturers, classmates, and family members. Some students went as far as dropping out or changing courses to escape situations where they felt unsafe. The long-term impact was also worrying—77% of respondents linked sexual harassment to poor grades, while 11% associated it with depression. Others highlighted how harassment could limit career growth and contribute to gender inequality in the professional world.

These findings reveal that sexual harassment is not just an individual problem but a systemic issue that affects the university as a whole. Without proper intervention, it will continue to disrupt students' education and well-being. Therefore, urgent action is needed to protect students and create a campus environment that is free from harassment.

## Conclusion

This study confirms that gender dynamics and sexual harassment are major issues affecting students at the University of Benin. While not all students experience harassment firsthand, those who do often suffer deeply. Their academic performance drops, they struggle with self-confidence, and their mental health declines due to stress and fear. Many victims skip classes, lose motivation, or feel unsafe interacting with lecturers and peers.

The study also shows that several factors contribute to the continued existence of sexual harassment on campus. Power imbalances, societal attitudes, peer pressure, and weak institutional policies create an environment where harassment is tolerated or ignored. Many victims stay silent out of fear of being blamed or not being taken seriously, which allows perpetrators to continue their actions without consequences.

Beyond academics, the long-term effects of sexual harassment can be damaging. Victims may develop anxiety, depression, or even lose interest in pursuing their career goals. Some may avoid certain professions altogether due to fear of encountering similar experiences in the workplace.

The findings of this study make it clear that sexual harassment is a serious issue that requires immediate attention. The university must take strong action to address the problem, support victims, and prevent future occurrences. A university should be a safe place for learning and personal growth—not a space where students feel threatened or unsafe.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following steps are recommended to help reduce sexual harassment and create a safer learning environment at the University of Benin:

1. **Increase Awareness and Education:** The university should hold regular seminars, workshops, and awareness campaigns to educate students and staff about sexual harassment, consent, and reporting procedures. This will help students recognize harassment and know how to handle it.
2. **Provide Support for Victims:** The university should establish counseling and support centers where victims of sexual harassment can receive psychological and legal assistance. Confidentiality should be ensured so that students feel safe seeking help.
3. **Empower Students to Speak Up:** Peer-led initiatives should be introduced, where trained students can support victims and promote respect and accountability on campus. These programs can help students report harassment without fear.
4. **Enforce Strict Policies:** The university must strengthen its policies against sexual harassment and ensure that all cases are taken seriously. Clear disciplinary measures should be in place so that perpetrators, whether students or staff, face consequences.
5. **Work with Law Enforcement:** The university should collaborate with law enforcement agencies and human rights organizations to improve the handling of sexual harassment cases and ensure victims receive justice.

6. Train Staff and Students: Workshops on gender sensitivity and bystander intervention should be provided to encourage students and staff to challenge harassment when they witness it. This will help create a culture of accountability.
7. Promote Safe Social Activities: The university should encourage safe extracurricular activities and mentorship programs where students can interact with faculty in a harassment-free environment.
8. Encourage Parental Involvement: Parents should be informed about the realities of sexual harassment on campus so they can provide emotional and moral support to their children.
9. Monitor Media and Cultural Influences: The university should discourage media content that normalizes sexual harassment and promote positive messages about gender respect and equality.
10. Conduct Regular Surveys and Research: To stay updated on trends in sexual harassment, the university should carry out periodic surveys and research. This will help assess whether interventions are working and what additional measures are needed.

### **Final Thoughts**

Addressing sexual harassment at the University of Benin requires collective effort from students, lecturers, university administrators, and policymakers. It is not enough to simply acknowledge the problem; concrete actions must be taken to prevent harassment, protect victims, and hold perpetrators accountable.

A safe and inclusive university environment benefits everyone. When students feel safe, they can focus on their studies, build healthy relationships, and develop confidence in their academic and professional aspirations. By taking the right steps, the University of Benin can become a place where all students regardless of gender can thrive without fear of harassment.

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