



Sexual Harassment for Grades in Tertiary Institutions –A Myth or Reality?

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On 22nd August 2011 after work, I got home and turned on my laptop. I went to Facebook and what I read from one of my student's wall really triggered this research and I quote "I WILL NOT SLEEP WITH YOU, YOU CAN FAIL ME 100 TIMES, I WILL CONTINUE TO RESIT. I WILL NOT SELL MY BODY FOR MARKS".

I was so much surprised with this on Facebook. Although I have heard several stories about similar incidents, I did not believe that it was happening in my own backyard I therefore, began to interrogate the issue of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Ghana to ascertain the extent of the problem.

Apparently, scholars have made interesting revelations concerning demand for sexual favours in exchange for exam grades in institutions of higher learning as a global phenomenon. Morley, L. and K. Lussier (2009), found that Sexual harassment in universities is not limited to Africa and stressed that it was a global issue and that for Ghana and Tanzania, some male lecturers "consider it their right to demand sex for grades"

In their paper, *Sex, Grades and Power: Gender Violence in Africa Higher Education*, Morley, L. and K., Lussier, assert that "hierarchical power relations within universities appear to have neutralized a sexual contract in which some male academics consider it their right to demand sex for grades, which has resulted in *constructive of negative*



female learner identities”, the paper explained further, that “if women fail, this is seen as evidence of their lack of academic abilities and preparedness of higher education. If they achieve academically, this is attributed to prostitution”.

This paper explores the issue of sexual harassment further. It seeks to determine whether and to what extent sexual harassment manifests itself in tertiary institution and if it exists, to propose measures to deal with it.

The paper is organized in four parts. The first part deals with the introduction and the second part consists of a review of literature on the subject.

In the third part, the results of interviews conducted on both male and female students in some selected tertiary institutions are analysed. The final part of the paper contains conclusions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Palto Alto Medical Foundation (2012) defines sexual harassment in schools as an unwelcome behavior - of a sexual nature - that makes you feel uncomfortable, fearful or powerless, and interferes with your schoolwork. Sexual harassment can happen to anyone -- male or female, student or adult employee and can manifest in a “quid pro quo” that is “give and take” sexual harassment or a hostile environment sexual harassment, which in other words, means sexual harassment at the workplace, which is offensive, hostile and/or intimidating and adversely affects that employee's ability to do his or her job.



Till. F (1980) also defined academic sexual harassment as “the use of authority to emphasize the sexuality or sexual identity of a student in a manner which prevents or impairs that student's full enjoyment of educational benefits, climate or opportunities” (pg. 7).

Wikipedia (April 2012) says sexual harassments is intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of reward in exchange for sexual favors.

Morley, L. and K. Lussier (2009), discuss the issue of sexual harassment and concluded that it was a phenomenon which is not only prevalent in Africa but the whole world. They found that male lecturers see it as a right to demand sex from students.

In his research paper, Gaba S., (2010) revealed that in Nigeria sex for grades in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria is a reality and stressed that the male lecturers in particular, see themselves as thin gods and as such act unprofessionally and believe that they will not be caught. Sheriff went further to give a vivid scenario:

“A lecturer develops sexual interest in a female student, usually a fresher. He summons her to his office and then proposes a sexual relationship straightaway.

If the female student refuses, he gives her two choices: "sleep with me or fail my course." Sometimes the threat is subtle most times it is not. At the end of the semester, the lecturer (depending on how determined he is to drive his point home) fails the concerned student in his course regardless of her actual performance in the course.

At this point, most female students capitulate while a few remain resolute until the concerned lecturer, after a couple of semesters or even sessions, wearies of his devious game and finally passes the student.”



Glaser and Thorpe (1986) (as cited by Fred Zindi (1994)) in their study on sexual harassment among psychology lecturers and their female postgraduate students in 16 universities in the United States, found that postgraduate students, because of their face to face contact with supervisors when seeking advice and supervision in their research studies, were sexually harassed more frequently than those females doing undergraduate courses.

Garret and Thomas-Peter (1994) in a survey on sexual harassment in postgraduate colleges as well as in places of employment, also reveal that in the UK, there were significant number of people in authority, such as lecturers, doctors and employers, who refuse to accept their moral responsibility, but instead exploit the vulnerability of those under them.

Writing on the subject, Dzeich and Weiner (2nd Ed 1990), found that sexual harassment is not about sex but about power in which the professors always holds the cards. They further stated that, in most of their stories recounted (evident) by students, these students depend on their professors for their academic future and therefore cannot resist the demands of these professors.

In the 1989 celebrated case of Janzen v Platy Enterprise Ltd of Canada (10 CHRR 1989), the Supreme Court of Canada defined sexual harassment in the workplace as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects the work environment or leads to adverse consequences for the victims of the harassment.

In his book, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (1992) (2nd Ed), Aggarwal A. P., notes that “sexual harassment is any sexually-oriented practice that endangers an individual's continued employment, negatively affects his/her work performance, or



undermines his/her sense of personal dignity. The author reiterates that the harassment behaviour may manifest itself blatantly in forms such as leering, grabbing, and even sexual assault, remarks about a woman's breasts, buttocks, vagina and her overall figure, sexual innuendoes and propositions for dates or sexual favours.

A similar understanding of sexual harassment is found in the guidelines of the American Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980), which provide that the unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, amount to sexual harassment when any of three conditions are met: when the submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; when the submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Backhouse C., and Cohen L., (1978), list examples of sexually harassing behaviour, which include the following: verbal innuendos and inappropriate affectionate gestures, which can escalate to attempted rape and rape; pinching; grabbing; hugging; leering; relentless proposal of physical intimacy, begging with subtle hints which may lead to overt requests for dates and sexual favours. Other forms include demanding sexual favours accompanied by implies or overt threats concerning jobs, grades, letters of recommendation and Physical assault (Sadler, 1981).

A common element found in the foregoing characteristics of sexual harassment is the importation of sexual requirements into the workplace, institution or places of study, thereby, negatively altering the working or studying conditions and environment of those employees and students forced to contend with sexual demands.



Commission on Human Rights and Justice (CHRAJ, 2000) in Ghana, warns that when acquiescence to sexual harassment is either implicitly or explicitly made a term or condition of employment or for exam scores, it can have negative impact on the persons forced to endure it, as sexual harassment injures the dignity and self-esteem of the person, causes humiliation, embarrassment and awkwardness. To that extent, therefore, it constitutes a violation of the fundamental human rights of the individual to freedom from discrimination (CHRAJ, 2000).

From the foregoing, it is trite to conclude that sexual harassment is widely understood as an unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects the workplace environment, schoolwork or school environment or leads to adverse consequences for the student-victims of the harassment. It manifests itself in several ways including attempted rape and rape, grabbing, hugging, patting, leering, begging with subtle hints which may lead to overt requests for dates and sexual favours and remarks about a woman's breasts, buttocks, vagina and her overall figure. Sexual harassment is growing in tertiary institutions the world over.

Because it injures the dignity and self-esteem of the person, sexual harassment constitutes a violation of the human rights of the victim. Quite rightly, sexual harassment has been of major concern and calls to adopt measures to deal with it are timely.

As the review of the literature shows, there is quite a substantial list of literature globally and from across Africa that deal with sexual harassment: Aggarwal A. P (1992); Backhouse C., and Cohen L., (1978); Gaba S., (2010); Sadler (1981) and Morley, L. and K. Lussier (2009), among others. However, literature on the subject "Sexual Harassment for Grades in Tertiary Institutions" is almost hard to come by, especially in Ghana.



The following issues, therefore, remain relevant:

1. Does sexual harassment, particularly for grades, exist in tertiary Institutions in Ghana?
2. If sexual harassment exist in tertiary institutions in Ghana, why, who, how and where does it take place frequently?
3. Can it be addressed adequately and if so, how?

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Overall, the paper, which seeks answers to the above pertinent issues, among others, adopted two main approaches, namely a literature review or desk study of relevant documentation on sexual harassment and interviewing key informants including students (past and present) from various schools and departments through structured and semi structured questionnaires.

Out of the three hundred and fifty (350) respondents on whom questionnaires were administered, two hundred and twenty three (223) were returned. The Majority (191) or 86.6% of respondents were within the ages of 18-25 years, followed by those in the 26-30 age groups. Respondents aged 31- 40 and 40 and above represented 2.7% (6) and 0.5% (1) of respondents, respectively. Female respondents constituted 140 or 65.4%, whilst male respondents were 74 or 35.6%

VICTIMS

Victims of sexual harassment can be either male or female. The study shows that 39 respondents who said they had been harassed before, i.e. 31 or 79.5% were females. Of the 39 respondents, 33 (86%) fell between the ages of 18-25 years. Those that were between the ages of 26-30 years comprised 10.3% (4) whilst 5.1% (2) were between 31-41 years.



Around two thirds of respondents stated that proposals to engage in sexual intercourse were made only once (31.7%) or twice (35%). The rest encountered it more frequently, ranging from four times to “uncountable times”.

HARASSING BEHAVIOR

The natures of harassment experienced by the victims were sexual intercourse (18%), fondling and kissing (15%). The other forms of sexual harassment recorded include, showing of the genitals, repeated demands for sex and suggestive sexual talks.

Another finding was that of the 37% of respondents who had experienced sexual harassment, the majority (45.8%) stated that the act took place in the office of the lecturer. 12% of respondents were sexually harassed in a hotel, while 3.6% experienced it in the place of abode of the lecturer. Other forms of sexual abuse occurred campuses, hostels and lecture halls.

PERPETRATORS/HARASSERS

Just as the victims of sexual harassment could be either male or female, the study showed that 83% of the perpetrators were male. Of this figure, 27 % were male lecturers. Only 5% of respondents said their harassers were female lecturers.

REASONS FOR ACQUIESCENCE

Various reasons were provided for acquiescing to sexual harassment by lecturers, the most significant being the need to safeguard an academic future. 35 respondents said that they were harassed in exchange for marks and that they (66%) felt obligated to yield to the sexual demands by the lecturers for fear that the lecturer would fail them if they refused.



The study further showed that 60% of 127 respondents said that they were prepared to report the conduct of those lecturers who harassed them to the authorities. The rest said they would not do so because they were either ashamed, scared or are afraid that it could jeopardize their education. In addition, the respondents indicated that they did not report and may not report because:

- They may be in trouble
- the authorities would not believe them
- there is no rule governing this topic on campus
- they want to save their education
- they could be victimized

PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE AND HARASSMENT

There was a general feeling among respondents that their performance in the subjects depended on whether or not they yielded to the unlawful demands for sex by the lecturer. Of the 62.5% of respondents who stated that they passed the exams or test papers by that lecturer harasser, 28.8% felt that they passed the lecturer's exam because they agreed to have sexual intercourse with the lecturer in question. 20% said they would have been failed if they did not accept to have sex with the lecturer, 40% said they may have been failed if they did not yield in to the lecturer.

While the data shows that the majority of respondents did not feel that they would have failed the exams or test papers of the lecturer if they refused to succumb to the pressure to have sex with the lecturer, 74.4% of students stated that they had heard of lecturers giving better marks to students who agreed to have sex with them.

Of those who had heard that better marks were given to students who agreed to have sex with the lecturers, the majority (48.1%) had heard it through social media tools. 32.8% had heard it first-hand through the affected students, The remaining 16% of respondents heard it from friends, rumours and student gossip.



CONCLUSION.

This study demonstrates that sexual harassment is growing in institutions of higher learning worldwide including institutions in Ghana in general and is prevalent in the students aged between 18-25 years. Though female lecturers are some of the perpetrators of sexual harassment of campuses, the males are the majority.

The students were coerced to yield to sexual advances of lecturers in order to safeguard their education. The offices of lecturers are the places mostly used by lecturers for harassing students.

Sexual harassment for marks is real and is spreading. Students who have been harassed are prepared to report if the conditions exist for them to do so. Such conditions would include education, prevention and proactive intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In terms of recommendations, it is very important and urgent for a more proactive, coordinated and a system which will involve all and sundry to combat sexual harassment in tertiary institutions. This therefore requires a holistic approach which includes:

- Adopting a zero tolerance for sexual harassment in institutions
- Develop a sexual harassment policy as part of an institution wide code of conduct for lecturers, which should be rigorously enforced.
- Establish whistle blowing mechanisms in institutions to encourage students report misconduct of lecturers without fear of victimization.
- There should be a clearly defined structure to report cases of this nature.
- Organize training on sexual harassment for students and Lecturers.



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