

## MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATES: A DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

**T**his study examined the prevalence and patterns of sexual harassment (SH) among undergraduates together with disparities in the experience based on demographic variables. The study made use of cross-sectional survey design. A total of 587 participants (252 males and 335 females) were selected among undergraduates of Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, through a non-proportional stratified sampling. Information were collected with the aid of Sexual Harassment Questionnaire ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and data were analysed through descriptive (frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics (independent t-tests and ANOVA). The outcome of the study showed that 27.9% of participants reported direct experiences of SH, 16.7% were doubtful, and 7.8% preferred not to disclose. The main offenders were non-members of university community and then fellow students, academics, and non-teaching staff respectively. The major forms of harassment reported are sexually expressive comments or jests, inordinate staring or leering, and meddling questions about one's private life or appearance. More reported harassment involved frequent or unacceptable advances via social platforms, undesirable physical contact, hugging, cornering, or kissing. It was statistically shown that female undergraduates, younger and lower academic level students were more susceptible to harassment. The study conclude that SH is an important misdemeanour in and around the university setting that is probably underreported. It is therefore important that universities device comprehensive interventions encompassing sensitisation training and provision of personalised professional assistance that will promote a non-toxic and more accommodating environment where every learner can learn successfully and experience positive mental health and a balanced psychological wellbeing

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, Demography, Academic level, Age, gender

### **Introduction**

As a response to the growing and disturbing waves of reported incidences of sexual harassment (SH) within Nigerian higher educational institutions, the Nigerian national parliament passed a bill on June 7,

2020, with the purpose of averting, proscribing, and tackling SH in these academic milieus. This parliamentary action signals the serious worry over a sense of embarrassment the misdemeanour has caused to affected educational institutions,

the nation, and the weighty effect on the wellness of victims, the reputation of perpetrators, and the general quality of the Nigerian education system.

Across different Nigerian tertiary institutions, a number of staff have faced austere and painful consequences of sexual harassment such as job dismissal, arraignment and incarceration. In some cases, the perpetrators have been openly humiliated and with videos or photographs displayed on social media by friends and associates of the victims. Equally students have been reportedly disciplined within different universities for offences related to sexual assault. In spite of these dealings, SH remains unabated as perpetrators appeared not deterred as incidences of SH are still much reported in Nigeria tertiary educational institutions. In awareness of this, scholars have continued investigate factors surrounding the prevalence, antecedents and effects of SH in Nigerian universities with a view to offer appropriately effective deterrents.

The United Nations (2008) conceptualised SH as “any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another”. Suleiman (2017) further defines SH as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and any physical, verbal, or nonverbal behaviour that either compels a person into compliance or retaliates against their refusal. This includes intimidation, pressure, disdain, undesirable touching,

forced kissing, exposure to pornographic information, and related acts. Aji et al. (2024) also describe SH as a persistent and hurtful kind of gender-based discrimination, encompassing uninvited sexual advances, demands for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical expressions of sexual conduct. According to Imonikhe et al. (2011), SH includes a variety of behaviours which ranges from sexual comments and jokes to the communicating romantic notes or images, and physical acts like touching, grabbing, or hitting. This behaviour can happen in lonely events or be repetitive over time. In addition, SH can happen through diverse interaction channels such as online platforms, direct messages, text messages, and emails that mock or embarrass others (Sultana, et al., 2021; Tune, 2021).

Although there is a dearth of school based statistical record on SH around different tertiary institutions in Nigeria, studies carried out by researchers across different geopolitical zones indicated that SH is widespread. For instance, a study by Erinsho et al. (2018) appraising the perception of students on prevalence of SH in Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago Iwoye in Southwest Nigeria revealed that as high as 60 per cent of the participants acknowledged its occurrence with 27 per cent attesting to its prevalence. Likewise, Norah (2020) reported that SH is widespread among tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. Also, a study carried out by Muoghalu and Olaoye (2016) among Obafemi Awolowo University students in the Southwest Nigeria indicated that as high as 47 per cent of the participants reported experience of SH. Aina-Pelemo et al. (2021) equally examined the prevalence

of Quid pro quo SH in selected Southwest Nigeria and found 42 per cent and 40 percent both at public and private institutions respectively. In the Northeast Nigeria, Onoyase (2019) investigated selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State and found high rate and commonness of SH across universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Also, Suleiman (2017) found that among female students in northern Nigeria's tertiary institutions examined, 80 percent reported experienced SH

In the South-south Nigeria, Omorogiuwa (2018), found that SH is considerably high among undergraduates of University of Benin specifically among females. In a cross-sectional study of institutional based SH in the five states in the south-eastern Nigeria, Obande-Ogbuinya et al (2022) found that 74 percent of female undergraduates experienced verbal and nonverbal SH. With focus on institutional types, Okondu et al. (2020) found that 41 per cent of female undergraduates reported being sexually harassed. Omorogiuwa (2018) and Mapayi et al. (2023) reported that females were more victims of SH compare to males. All these showed pervasiveness of SH in Nigeria tertiary institution.

Psycho-educational and socioeconomic implications of SH on both victims and perpetrators are massive. Different study outcomes on socio-psychological impacts of SH revealed that victims face difficult situations. For example, Duba et al. (2020) found that victims are susceptible to stigmatisation. Also, Gyawali (2020) discovered that they are vulnerable to mental health difficulties like depression, anxiety

and stress. In addition, Barbier et al. (2023) found that they are at increased risk of suicidal ideation, cynicism, substance use and emotional exhaustion. Other risks include fear and trauma (Taiwo, et al., 2014), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Kheswa, 2014), as well as shame and fear of more harassment (Anwar, 2022).

Academically, SH is connected to scholastic problems including low Grade Point Average, high rate of university dropout, and difficulty in self-regulated learning problems (Molstad, et al., 2023). SH further weakens academic integrity as students who obtain degrees through academic fraud traceable to sexual coercion may have challenges defending their certificate (Taiwo, et al., 2014). It negatively predicts physical health (Worke, et al., 2023) as victims are liable to contract HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (Kheswa, 2014). Economically, Hejase (2021) found that SH places high financial burden on healthcare system, adjudication agency inquiry, individual litigation costs, government judicature system costs, and deadweight losses.

The research outcomes from earlier studies in relation to perpetrators of SH in Nigeria universities seem to agree although the degree of involvement vary across studies. For instance, Ogbonnaya et al. (2011) found that most of the instances of SH reported by undergraduates were found to be committed by fellow students (49.1%), afterward lecturers (39.8%) and non-academic staff (11.1%). Furthermore, Bitew and Bewuket (2019) discovered that SH offenders in campus include male students, lecturers, and others members of the community such as

taxi drivers and businessmen. Sheikh et al (2014) found that SH is mostly committed by unfamiliar person (64%), followed by the fellow students (21%), academics (13%) and other staff members. Olugbenga-Bello et al., (2023) equally found that principal committers of harassment were targets' boyfriends. Furthermore Farinloye, and Omobuwa (2016) discovered that students were primarily responsible for 78.3% of harassments, followed by lecturers (15.2%) and administrative staff(6.5%).

Gender has been considered in research as a factor that determines increase the risk of sexual harassment. Most studies showed that females were more prone to experience of SH compared to males (Muasya & Kahiga, 2020; Kisiel, et al., 2020; Gómez, 2022). Ekore (2012) found that females scored higher in the measure of sexual harassment. Also, Omorogiuwa (2018) discovered that incidences of SH are prominently directed towards females than males. Equally, Akinlusi et al. (2014) discovered that women in higher educational institutions are more vulnerable to SH than their male counterparts. Inversely, Adu et al. (2024) found no significant gender differences in students' experience of unsolicited SH. Nevertheless, they further found that female students were more sexually coerced extensively than males.

Studies on impact of age on SH among undergraduates have generated variegated findings. For instance, Akpunne et al. (2020) discovered that the tendency of experience of SH increases with age. On the other hand, other studies found contrariwise. Ogunfowokan et al (2024) found higher

prevalence of experience of SH among younger students compared with their older mates. In addition, Hassen and Mohammed (2021) found that students below the age of 25 are more susceptible to SH

Studies assessing sexual harassment experience across academic levels, though important, are relatively rare. Nevertheless, some accessible studies suggests that academic level likely has impact on SH (Dibia et al., 2023). Particularly, students in their lower academic journey tend to be more exposed to SH than those at the upper layer of academic. For instance, by Mezie-Okoye and Alamina (2014) found that SH was highly widespread among students in their 100 and 200 levels. Likewise, Olugbenga-Bello et al. (2023) found that SH was unlikely common among students in their advanced academic years. In addition, Ogunfowokan et al. (2024) reported that the narratives of SH were not common among non-final year students when compared to the first-year students. The reason adduced to this discrepancy is that students at the lower level are inexperienced in finding their way around in the university and so are likely to fall prey to the perpetrators while striving to seek guidance (Dibia et al., 2023).

SH persists to be a universal issue, with its prevalence and overwhelming corollaries on victims' mental, monetary, physically, and scholastic well-being warranting continual research endeavours. Researchers have investigated its antecedents, prevalence, and impact on both victims and perpetrators (Mapayi et al.; 2023; Barbier et al.; 2023; Adaramoye, et al., 2024; Ogunfowokan et al., 2024). Yet, concern about its increasing

incidence among young adults in Nigeria continues especially among undergraduates. Despite series of measures taking to curb the behaviour, the efficacy of the current interventions remains unreliable as SH continuously reported. This justifies the necessity of continuous research to track the tendencies and appraise progress.

In addition, demographic disparities that shape vulnerability to SH are not well documented. Although gender differences in SH are widely reported, literature is not robust regarding other demographic variables such as age and academic levels which are believed to place a significant role in experience of SH among undergraduates. This create important lacuna in recognising the more vulnerable group of students to SH. Without filling this gap in research, stakeholders may find it difficult to device suitable and empirical interventions to safeguard the at-risk undergraduates from this prevalent misdemeanour. These lacunas identified, there is need for studies that observe both the prevalence and demographic differences to offer the behavioural change experts the acumen on developing effective corrective measures purposefully focusing on the most vulnerable populations

### Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence and who are the perpetrators of sexual harassment experience among undergraduates?
2. What are the common forms of sexual harassment among undergraduates?

### Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested

at a 0.05 alpha level:

1. There is no significant difference in the experience of SH between male and female undergraduates.
2. There is no significant difference in the experience of SH among undergraduates based on age differences.
3. There is no significant difference in the experience of SH among undergraduates based on academic level.

### Methods and Measure

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, which was deemed appropriate due to its ability to capture data at a single point in time, providing a broad idea of the prevalence and demographic variations in experiences of SH. The study population comprises undergraduates at Emmanuel Alayande University of Education. At the time of the study, this included students enrolled in affiliate programs with Ekiti State University (200 to 400 levels) and students of Emmanuel Alayande University of Education (100 and 200 levels). A stratified sampling technique, based on faculty divisions, was used to select 587 participants. A thorough itemisation of the participants' demographic information showed that 335 (57.1%) were female. In relation to age classification, 27.6% were between 16 and 20 years, 21.5% were between 21 and 25 years, while 15.7% were 25 years and above. With respect to faculty representation, 117 participants were from the Faculty of Arts Education, 116 from Science Education, 118 from Social Science Education, 120 from Specialised and Professional Education, and 116 from Vocational, Innovation, and

Engineering Education. All participants resided off-campus.

Five trained research assistants, each representing one of the five faculties, were engaged in administering the instruments. Each of the research assistants collected 120 copies, ensuring coverage of at least 30 participants throughout diverse academic levels. Participants' consent was obtained, and they were informed about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw if they felt their rights were infringed upon.. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Of the distributed copies, 593 were returned, but 6 were improperly completed. The researchers were therefore satisfied with a response rate of 97.83%. On average, each participant took approximately eight minutes to complete the instrument. The entire data collection process was completed within one week.

### Measure

The major instrument used in the study was adapted from the Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey questionnaire developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2018). The scale is named "Sexual Harassment Questionnaire". The original scale originally contained 16 items in a four-point rating format (Yes, No, Don't Know, Prefer Not to Say). Nevertheless, a dichotomous rating style involving "Yes" (1) and "No" (0) was embraced to acquire a more accurate information from the respondents. Diverse forms of sexual harassment were

presented to the respondents necessitating the respondents' answer if they have experienced them. Higher score is an indication of greater experience of SH. The scale was pilot tested among 40 students of non-participating university and the test-retest of the instrument yielded  $r=.91$  and a Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) of .88 showing a strong reliability index.

Furthermore, Section A of the questionnaire obtained demographic information, specifications about the perpetrators of SH, and whether participants had experienced SH ( with the responses: Definitely Not, Not Sure/I don't know, Prefer not to say, and Yes, certainly and clear).

### Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26.0). Descriptive statistics were applied to answer the research questions and to summarise the data collected. In addition, the hypotheses generated were tested using independent t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA), giving room for comparisons of data through groups and classifying significant differences where needed with the assistance of Scheffé post hoc test.

### Results

The first research question asked for the prevalence of SH among undergraduates. The Table 1 gives an explanation of the trend and prevalence of SH among undergraduates.

**Table 1**  
Prevalence and Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment Among Undergraduates

Variables	Frequency	(%)
<b>Have you suffered any kind of sexual harassment during your stay at University?</b>		
Definitely Not	279	47.5
Not Sure/I don't know	98	16.7
Prefer not to say	46	7.8
Yes, certainly and clear	164	27.9
<b>Who was the individual or group involved in the sexual harassment you experienced?</b>		
Fellow Student	94	16.0
Lecturer/ faculty member	37	6.3
none Academic Staff	21	3.5
Someone outside the university	167	28.4
None/ prefer not to say	268	45.7

From Table 1, it can be deduced that out of the respondents, 47.5% reported that they had definitely not experienced SH during their stay at the university, while 27.9% stated yes, certainly and clear. Additionally, 16.7% were not sure and 7.8% preferred not to say. Therefore, the percentage of undergraduates who confirmed SH experience is relatively high not minding those who are not sure or preferred not to say.

Regarding the individuals or groups

involved, 16.0% identified a fellow student, 6.3% a lecturer or faculty member, and 3.5% non-academic staff. Notably, 28.4% indicated that the perpetrator was someone outside the university, while 42.1% either reported none or preferred not to say.

The second research question asked “What are the common forms of SH among undergraduates?” The answer is as presented in Table 2

**Table 2**  
Forms of Sexual Harassment among Undergraduates

NO	YES		
Item		Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)
1	Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing	314 (53.5)	273 (46.5)
2	Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	254 (43.3)	333 (56.7)
3	Sexual gestures, indecent exposure or inappropriate display of the body	408 (69.5)	179 (30.5)
4	Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	239 (40.7)	348 (59.3)
5	Sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts that made you feel offended	353 (60.1)	234 (39.9)
6	Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	349 (59.5)	238 (40.5)
7	Intrusive questions about your private life or physical appearance that made you feel offended	265 (45.1)	322 (54.9)
8	Inappropriate physical contact	319 (54.3)	268 (45.7)
9	Being followed, watched or someone loitering nearby	411 (70.0)	176 (30.0)
10	Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts	378 (64.4)	209 (35.6)
11	Actual or attempted rape or sexual assault	446 (76.0)	141 (24.0)
12	Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine	409 (69.7)	178 (30.3)
13	Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages or on social media	423 (72.1)	164 (27.9)
14	Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites or internet chat rooms	301 (51.3)	286 (48.7)
15	Sharing or threatening to share intimate images or film of you without your consent	482 (82.1)	105 (17.9)
16	Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that occurred online or via some form of technology	415 (70.7)	172 (29.3)

Table 2 discloses that participants experienced almost all kinds of SH appraised. The most frequently reported kind comprised sexually suggestive comments or jokes, inordinate staring or leering, and unpleasant questions about their private lives or physical appearance. Other remarkable types included recurrent or unsuitable advances via email, social networking sites, or internet chat rooms, as well as undesirable touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing. Moreover, a significant number of

participants reported inapposite physical contact, continual or undesirable invitations to go on dates, and exposure to sexually explicit pictures, posters, or gifts that caused them offense.

To test the first hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between male and female participants in the measure of SH, the result is as stated in Table 3

**Table 3**  
Gender Difference in Sexual Harassment Experience among Undergraduates

Gender	N	M	S. D.	df	t	MD	Sig.
Male	252	5.28	3.92	585	4.373	1.58	<.001
Female	335	6.85	4.60				

The analysis in Table 3 yielded a significant t-value ( $t_{(585)} = 4.373$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The male undergraduates ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $SD = 3.92$ ) scored significantly lower in the measure of SH than Female participants ( $M = 6.85$ ,  $SD = 4.60$ ). These findings indicate that gender is a significant factor in the SH, with females experiencing SH significantly higher than males. The hypothesis of none significance

could therefore not be upheld

In response to the second hypothesis, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out to examine if there were significant differences in the SH experience of undergraduates across their age groups. The result is as contained in Table 4

**Table 4(a)**  
ANOVA Appraisal of Undergraduates Sexual Harassment Experiences by Age Disparity

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3407.607	2	1703.804	126.368	<.001
Within Groups	7873.967	584	13.483		
Total	11281.574	586			

The analysis in Table 4(a) revealed a statistically significant effect of group membership on the dependent variable owing to F-ratio ( $F_{(2, 584)} = 126.368$ ,  $p < .001$ ) that is statistically significant at .05 alpha level. The between-group variance was substantial compared to the within-group variance indicating that a significant portion of the total variance can be attributed to differences between the age groups. This result suggests that the mean scores of

undergraduates on the measure of SH differ significantly across the three age groups examined. Therefore, the hypothesis could not be upheld.

Following a significant one-way ANOVA, Scheffé post hoc comparisons were conducted to examine differences in mean scores across the three age groups. The results are presented in Table 4(b).

**Table 4(b)**  
Pairwise Comparisons of Sexual Harassment Experience by Age Differences

Level	N	M	S D	Mean Difference	
				16-20 years	21-25 Years
16-20 years	162	10.04	3.53		
21-25 years	333	4.49	3.53	5.56**	
> 25 years	92	5.50	4.36	4.54**	1.01

As shown in Table 3, the results suggest that younger participants (16–20 years) scored significantly higher in the measure of SH than their older counterparts, while the disparity between the two older groups (21–25years and >25 years) on measure of

SH was not statistically significant. The implication based on this outcome is that age is an important factor in the SH, with younger individuals be affected by the highest experience.

In relation to Hypothesis 3, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to find out whether there were statistically significant disparities in the

experiences of SH among undergraduates across diverse academic stages. The results are presented in Table 5(a).

**Table 5(a)**  
ANOVA Comparison of Undergraduates Sexual Harassment Experiences by Academic Level

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1575.258	3	525.086	31.539	<.001
Within Groups	9706.316	583	16.649		
Total	11281.574	586			

The results in Table 5(a) showed a statistically significant difference in SH experience of undergraduate students based on their academic levels. This is because the F-ratio ( $F(3, 583) = 31.539, p < .001$ ) is statistically significant at .05 alpha level. The between-group variance was significantly greater than the within-group variance. This is an indication that the differences observed among the group means could not be

attributed to random chance. This results summarily imply that undergraduates do not experience SH in the same level while putting academic levels into consideration

Following a significant one-way ANOVA, Scheffé post hoc comparisons were conducted to examine the differences in mean scores across academic levels. The results are as presented in Table 5(b):

**Table 5(b)**  
Pairwise Comparisons of Sexual Harassment Experience by Academic Level

Level	N	M	S D	Mean Difference		
				100	200	300
100 Level	149	8.73	4.39			
200 Level	148	6.30	4.32	2.43**		
300 Level	143	5.22	4.12	3.51**	1.08	
400 Level	147	4.39	3.42	4.34**	1.91**	.84

The outcomes as recorded in Table 5(b) indicate a gradual reduction in the mean scores of the participants in the measure of SH based on academic levels. The 100 Level participants recorded the highest while 400 Level participants scored the lowest. Specifically, statistically significant differences were principally observed between lower and higher academic levels, indicating a probable decrease in the measured SH as students advance in level. Precisely, it was found that undergraduates in

100 Level recorded significantly higher than their counterparts in any other academic level. The 200 Level students also scored significantly higher than 400 Level students. Nevertheless, the variation in the mean scores of 200 Level and 300 Level undergraduates was not notably significant. Likewise, the mean scores of 300 Level students in the measure of SH was slightly higher than their mates in 400 Level but the difference was not statistically significant.

### Discussion of Findings

The major goal of this study was to examine the pervasive tendencies and manners of SH among undergraduates, while also finding out the impact of demographic diversities on undergraduates' experience of SH. The outcomes demonstrated an ominously high ubiquity of SH among the participants emphasising its persistent significance as a major concern within and round university community. It was discovered from the study that over and above one-quarter of the participants reported experience of SH. This is in concord the outcomes the previous studies such as Okondu et al. (2020), Aina-Pelemo, Oke, and Alade (2021), and Obande-Ogbuinya et al. (2022), who all documented that SH is pervasive and has been a continual crisis in the university community especially among undergraduates. The consistent of the current study with the previous ones is an indication that in spite of the efforts made by various institutions to curtail the misdemeanour through creation of awareness and the presence of institutional policies, SH continues to be a social vices in academic community.

One remarkable discovery from this study is that perpetrators of SH were not limited to members of university community. Although staffers and students were reportedly involved, a significant percentage of participants (28.4%) reported harassment by non-members of university community. This external threat to the university community calls for managements and stakeholders to widen the horizon of their protective structures beyond the border of the campus. This finding is in tandem with the study of Sheikh et al. (2014), who found that

none members of university community represented the greater part of SH perpetration. This could be attributed to continual contact of the students with the neighbouring urban environment, most importantly as largest number of student in the studied area live outside the campus where they make contacts with diverse people in the areas of transport, businesses and residences where maximum safety and institutional control could to be guaranteed.

Within the university community, students were identified as the most perpetrators of SH. This is followed by lecturers and non-teaching staffer, in that order. The finding is in agreement with the earlier studies of Bitew and Bewuket (2019) and Farinloye and Omobuwa (2016) who reported similar findings. The result could be connected with disparateness, peer influence, and abuse of power in the structure of educational relationship. In addition, the high pervasiveness observed among students in relation to SH could be due to the poor orientation on what constitutes boundaries and consent in peer relationship as well as lack of proper punitive consequences.

One other important discovery in this study is the high proportion of the participants who were either not sure or preferred not to reveal their SH experience. This hesitancy may be an indication that the victims battle fear of stigmatisation and may be undergoing attached psychological trauma, and uncertainty of medium of reportage. Furthermore, the outcome in a tip to under-declaring which is commonly noted in research relating to SH and an indication that SH occurrences is higher than how it is

reported. Intimidation, social rules, and fear of social repercussions and lack of trust about how the institution will treat the report may also dampen the courage of victims from opening up

It was equally found in this study that female undergraduates are more susceptible to SH compare with males. This is a manifestation of continual gender disparity in experience of the harassment within tertiary educational establishments. This observed disparity new in the study of SH as other researchers like Muasya and Kahiga (2020), Kisiel et al. (2020), and Gómez (2022) have consistently reported that women are unequally affected by SH across diverse educational environments. Many reasons could be adduced to this including gender stereotypic ideology that promotes masculinity hegemony and societal acceptance of impropriety conducts toward females and imbalance in power sharing within the university community. Furthermore, female undergraduates, most importantly younger ones, might be more targeted owing to their apparent defencelessness and lack of institutional and social power that give opportunity to perpetrators seeking to make use of the imbalances easily exploit them.

The current study also found out major age-linked inequality in the incident of SH. Younger undergraduates were found to be more disproportionately affected. The outcome is not surprising as it has been similarly reported in the earlier studies of Hassen and Mohammed (2021) and Ogunfowokan et al. (2024) that younger undergraduates are more vulnerable to SH in the university environment. One explanation

that could be offered to such finding is in relation to developmental and psychological factors connected with youths. Developmentally, the younger ones are still in the process of creating boundaries and cultivating self-confidence in interpersonal relations which make them more prone to unscrupulous intimidating behaviours. In addition, their immaturity in treating multifarious social and power distribution can also strengthen their exposure to abuse particularly in situation where they are not well acquainted with social system and are quick to extend trust. Moreover, the perpetrators may use the opportunity of the society's portray of youth as naïve and submissive to take advantage of them.

Apart from age, the study outcomes revealed that students in their lower academic levels predominantly encounter SH. This observation is coherent with the outcomes of the studies Olugbenga-Bello et al. (2023), Dibia et al. (2023), and Ogunfowokan et al. (2024) who observed that occurrences of SH tend to weaken as students move up through their academic years. A conceivable justification is that at early stage of academic life, students are not well conversant with university environment and system, support systems, rule of conducts and mode of reporting. As newly admitted they are likely perceived as gullible, amenable or friendly. These perceived attributes might be strong weapons the perpetrators exploit to them. However, as students advance in their academic years, they become more experienced, well assertive, socially incorporated and are well versed in recognition and treatment of illicit behaviours. In Addition, students in the upper

levels of academics might have been acquainted with series of sensitisation programmes, peer support system and university rules in the course of time that will endow them exercise their rights and protect themselves against harassment.

### **Conclusion**

The outcomes of this study showed that sexual harassment is distressingly pervasive among undergraduates. The at-risk groups are mostly young students and those in lower academic levels. In addition, female students were found to be more vulnerable to the experience, supporting the previous studies on SH. It is also deduced from the findings that SH may be likely underreported owing to a considerable number of participants who preferred not to disclose their experience of harassment. It was further discovered from the outcomes that perpetrators are not limited to individuals within the perimeters of university campus as participants also acknowledged outside influences and co-students as main forces behind SH. Based on this awareness, it could be considered most importantly that university administrations will need to devise series of interventions that encompass sensitisation training focusing on what could be prohibited and permissible relationship and safe ways of reporting top secret, and provision of personalised professional assistance. In addition, the study shows the need for university management not to only strengthen policies that can curb SH internally but also collaborate with communities outside in order to provide security beyond the borders of the campus. These measures will be needed to enhance a non-toxic and more accommodating university environment where every learner

can learn successfully and experience positive mental health psychological wellbeing.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. The university administration should develop a set of interventions that include sensitisation training, emphasising what constitutes illegal and legal relationships, as well as safe and confidential reporting of incidents.
2. The student support and counselling service centres in each university should offer more personalised professional help to at-risk students. This will give them the strength to report their experiences before they are fully recorded and overwhelmed by the perpetrators.
3. The university administration should not only enhance internal policies that can help reduce sexual harassment (SH), but also work with other stakeholders in the external community to ensure safety outside the university walls.
4. Counselling psychologists should empower more at-risk groups with assertiveness training to give them the strength to report all forms of sexual harassment (SH) to the relevant authorities without fear of intimidation or stigma.

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