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Influence of Assertiveness Training in Preventing Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Universities as Perceived by Counsellors in Kwara State

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment is gaining momentum in Nigerian universities in recent times than decades ago. This study therefore examined the influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment in Nigerian universities as perceived by counsellors in Kwara State. The study adopted survey method. A total of 500 counsellors were randomly selected as samples. Self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. It had a reliability coefficient of 0.82 using a test-retest method. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to answer the research questions raised and to test the four null hypotheses. Results revealed that counsellors supported the introduction of assertiveness training for preventing sexual harassments in universities. There was significant difference based on counsellors' level of education, religions and gender, but none for knowledge of assertiveness skills. It was suggested that training in the skill of assertiveness should be encouraged by university students' affairs divisions in order to students' awareness.

Keywords: *Assertiveness-Training, Sexual Harassment, Universities, Counsellors*

INTRODUCTION

Assertiveness is an integral part of humans' relationships. To be assertive is to be able to hold on to one's beliefs, philosophy about life, as well as what to accept and not to accept at different times and situations. It is a skill and an individual's capacity to engage other individuals in meaningful interpersonal relationships¹.

Sexual harassment has skyrocketed to a point that it is now addressed with a title 'culture of sexual harassment'². It has attracted various researchers in recent past^{3,4,5,6}. Government has promulgated policies and measures against undisciplined lecturers, yet, it appears there is no change of attitude nor justice for victims².⁷ defines assertiveness as one that has to do with self-defense in order to prevent violence against womenfolk. Assertiveness is a way of strengthening females' capacity for self-defense in situations of sexual harassments.

⁸view assertiveness as a quality which gives opportunity for self-advocacy, state one's positions, achieve goals, control aggressive impulses, without infringing on

the rights of others around. Accordingly, assertiveness training is required for self-actualization⁸. Therefore, if assertiveness is required for self-attainment, there is the need to incorporate its skills into university undergraduates in order to put sexual harassment, which is a threat on their path towards self-actualization into check.

A fundamental human right is the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, of which sexual harassment is a key component⁹.¹⁰ reiterates that its mission is to advocate for the protection of children's rights to help meet their basic needs and to expand opportunities to reach their full potentials.¹¹views sexual harassment as a major public health crisis that significantly hinders the development and education of female students in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, where research findings show the menace is high.

Reports found that in Nigerian higher institutions, lustfulness is common with male lecturers. The reality is that sexual abuse permeates all levels of education, from tertiary down to nursery levels¹². The commonest form of sexual harassment in higher institutions is

sexual advances from male lecturers to female students³; thus, confirming the unequal power relations where the perpetrator occupies a position of authority over the victim. Furthermore,¹³ lists behaviour of sexual harassment as: teasing, jokes, comments; unwanted sexual pressures; unwanted touching, with implied threats of academic-related consequences for non-cooperation; physical assault; and rape.

In other instances, male undergraduates also sexually harass female students, which is a manifestation of uneven power relations; tilting towards gender-based violence that negatively impacts on victims' rights¹³; whereas, good understanding of assertiveness could have prevented such scenario, with both parties (undergraduates) becoming good friends, devoid of sexual assaults. Moreover, some female undergraduates are lackadaisical towards their academics, which sometimes emboldens male lecturers to engage them in unethical relationships. They exchange banter like "use what you have to get what you want", and this has become a slogan among female undergraduates who would not attend lectures, nor sit for assessments, yet, would desire to have good grades when continuous assessments are administered. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the problem of sexual harassment has persisted in universities, notwithstanding the various times lecturers have been laid off in certain universities¹⁴.

Researchers studied sexual harassment and psychological consequences among students in higher institutions in Osun³, and found that 98.8% of cases of sexual harassment occurred between a male lecturer and female students.¹⁵ studied sexual harassment experiences of female graduates of Nigerian universities, and found that about 70% of the respondents have been harassed while in the university by lecturers, with no reporting made to the institutions' managements.¹³ worked on sexual harassment in three faith-based universities in Ogun and found that sexual harassment was prevalent in the universities.¹² reported that in Nigerian higher institutions, lechery is high with male lecturers. Institutional sexual harassments had attracted various researchers^{4,16,5,6}.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To determine the influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment in Nigerian universities as perceived by counsellors in Kwara state.

Research Questions

1. What is the influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment in Nigerian university system as perceived by counsellors?
2. To what extent are counsellors knowledgeable about the skill of assertiveness?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' level of education.
2. There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' religions.
3. There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' gender.
4. There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' knowledge of assertiveness skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative type and it adopted survey design. The population were all guidance counsellors in Kwara state. Total of 500 participants were randomly selected from the three senatorial districts in the state; 300 from Kwara Central and 100 each from North and South. Counsellors were selected from universities, polytechnic, colleges of education, and secondary schools. Self-designed questionnaire entitled "Assertiveness Training for Preventing Sexual Harassment (ATPRESHQ)" was used for data collection. It had two parts (A & B); part A focused on respondents' demography and B had items on influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment. Four-point Likert type on a 4-1 scoring was used. Reliability coefficient was 0.82. Data collected were analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

RESULTS**Table 1: Level of education, religious affiliations, gender and knowledge of assertiveness**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Level of Education		
Bachelor's Degree	155	38.8
Master's Degree and Higher	245	61.2
Religious Affiliations		
Christianity	205	51.2
Islam	160	40.0
Others	35	8.8
Gender		
Male	164	41.0
Female	236	59.0
Knowledge of Assertiveness Skill		
Very Deep	261	65.3
Little	120	30.0
None	18	4.7

Table 1 showed that there were more counsellors with master's degree and above; counsellors practicing Christianity were more than their Muslim colleagues or others; while female counsellors outnumbered their male colleagues; and majority had very deep knowledge of assertiveness skill.

Research Questions: What is the influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment in Nigerian university system as perceived by counsellors in Kwara State?

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of Counsellors' Perceptions on Influence of Assertiveness Training in Preventing Sexual Harassment

S. No.	As far as I am concerned, assertiveness training can address the menace of sexual harassment in universities because it:	Mean	Rank
1.	enables an individual to say NO when necessary	3.54	1 st
2.	teaches one to be more sensitive to his/her environment	3.52	2 nd

Conted...

3.	assists in making reflective thinking for adequate adjustments	3.48	3 rd
4.	provides adequate psychological security	3.44	4 th
5.	helps in teaching students to be more serious to school work	3.41	5 th
6.	makes the individual adhere to school rules without being coerced	3.40	6 th
7.	assists in affirming human self-worth at all times	3.39	7 th
8.	makes one become more aware of him/herself	3.38	8 th
9.	helps to distinguish between appropriate gifts and traps/baits	3.36	9 th
10.	offers escape routes at critical moments, e.g. when faced with sexual harassment	3.35	10 th
11.	teaches one the will to maintain his/her stand on critical issues like sexual harassment	3.28	11 th
12.	teaches one how to maintain healthy boundaries at all times	3.28	11 th
13.	assists students in making adequate planning	3.28	11 th
14.	helps in treating every issue with the required details at all times	3.25	14 th
15.	builds more confidence in the individual	3.19	15 th
16.	alerts one when he/she is exceeding certain boundaries/limits	3.18	16 th
17.	saves students from avoidable mistakes/errors	3.15	17 th
18.	teaches students effective time management	3.15	17 th
19.	saves students from avoidable sanctions from lecturers which could have led to situations of sexual harassments	3.00	19 th
20.	helps students distinguish between essentials for success and frivolities	2.82	20 th

Table 2 revealed that all the items had high mean scores, hence, counsellors agree that assertiveness training can go a long way in addressing the menace of sexual harassments. Ability to say NO; being more

sensitive to one's environment; reflective thinking for adequate adjustments topped the list i.e. 1st to 3rd respectively, whereas, the only item that fell below 3 points had a mean of 2.82 which was above the average mean score of 2 points.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' level of education.

Table 3: Results of Independent Samples t-test on the basis of Level of Education

Level of Education	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. T-val	Crit. T-val	P-val
Bachelor's Degree	155	65.6452	5.84179	398	2.526	1.96	0.013
Master's Degree	245	65.9224	4.92964				

*Significant; p0.05

Table 3 showed that the t-value (2.526) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Therefore, the null was rejected; $t(df = 398) = 2.526, p0.05$.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' religions.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results Showing Showing Counsellors' Perceptions based on Religion

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. f-ratio	Crit.	F-ratio Sig.
Between Groups	192.641	2	96.320			
Within Groups	10999.669	397	27.707	3.476	3.00	0.032
Total	11192.310	399				

*Significant; p0.05

Table 4 indicated that the F-ratio of 3.476 was obtained, while the critical F-ratio was 3.00, whereas, the p-value (0.032) was less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' gender.

Table 5: Results of Independent Samples t-test on the basis Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. T-val	Crit. T-val	P-val
Male	164	66.5122	4.67927	398	2.290	1.96	0.031
Female	236	65.3305	5.64489				

*Significant; p0.05

Table 5 revealed that the t-value (2.290) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected; $t(df = 398) = 2.290, p0.05$.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in influence of assertiveness training in preventing sexual harassment based on counsellors' knowledge of assertiveness.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results Showing Counsellors' Perceptions based on Knowledge of Assertiveness Skills

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. f-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	Sig.
Between Groups	136.848	3	45.616			
Within Groups	11055.462	396	27.918	1.634	2.60	0.181
Total	11192.310	399				

*Significant; p0.05

Table 6 showed that the F-ratio of 1.634 was obtained, while the critical F-ratio was 2.60, whereas, the p-value (0.181) was greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Findings of this study indicated that assertiveness training is considered a strategy with enormous influence in preventing sexual harassment in Nigerian university system. The skills of assertiveness enable an individual to say NO appropriately, teach one to be aware and sensitive to his/her environment, help in making reflective thinking, provide one with adequate psychological security, and be diligent to academics, among other high ranking items. This finding supports ⁴ which affirms that undergraduates become victims of institutional sexual harassment when they cannot draw boundaries in their relationships with lecturers. It supports ¹⁶ which assert that workplace sexual harassments persists because of victims' inability to draw considerable limits between official and secular activities.

Furthermore, findings revealed that assertiveness also teaches students to adhere to university's regulations, and assists them in affirming their self-worth; making them avoid being subjected to psychological trauma, and poor future relationships. These findings support ³ that sexual harassments leave untold severe damage in victims, and often disrupts future relationships. This further supports ¹³ and ¹⁵ which had variously found that underreporting of indicators of sexual harassment was largely responsible reoccurrences. Fear associated to underreporting may be overcome if female undergraduates embrace the skill of assertiveness. The finding also revealed that counsellors in Kwara state were more knowledgeable in the use of assertiveness.

In testing the hypotheses, findings showed that there was a significant difference based on level of education. This may have resulted from the experience through higher education. Majority of the counsellors had deep knowledge of assertiveness skills, compared to their colleagues with only bachelor's degree. This implies that educational attainment determines how better informed counsellors can be. This supports why counselling practice in the US begins with a minimum qualification of master's degree¹⁷.

The findings also revealed that there was a significant difference based on religion. This may have resulted due to the various beliefs and philosophies held by different faiths. This supports ⁸ who maintained that some cultural beliefs often prevent people from maximizing the skill of assertiveness. The finding supports ¹⁸ which held that

certain religion rebuffs the concept of assertiveness for its adherents. Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference on gender. This may be due to some sense of entitlements that most males have towards issues that have to do with females¹⁹⁻²¹. This supports ¹¹ & ⁵ claims that patriarchal entitlements largely keep victims in perpetual subjectivity. Thus, the skill is assertiveness is considered suitable for preventing incidence of sexual harassments in Nigerian universities, particularly, Kwara state.

Recommendation: Periodic training in assertive skills to female and male undergraduates alike by the counselling centres of each university. This will largely assist in addressing the menace of sexual harassment in the university and rid the system off the recurring scourge.

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