



The Traumatic Implications of Sexual Assault on the Academic Performances of Female Students: A Study of Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

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ABSTRACT: This research seeks to investigate the traumatic implications of sexual assault of female students of selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State on their academic performance. The specific objectives were to basically assess the relationship between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures and the relationship between sexual assault and academic failure. The research was carried out using a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was one thousand three hundred and seventy (896) female students of three selected tertiary institutions under study. Data was collected from primary source using a well structured questionnaire. Designed instrument was validated through content validity using five experts from both the industry and academia. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 probability level of significance aided by computer through the application of statistical packaging for social sciences (SPSS version 23). Findings indicated that: there was a significant relationship between sexual assault ($r = 0.104$, $p = 0.000$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$) and non-attendance to lectures and the relationship between sexual assault ($r = 0.014$; $p=0.001$; $p\text{-value} < .05$) and academic failure. It is recommended that school management should establish counseling units across all tertiary institutions with professional counselors employed to counsel victims as well as encouraging them to move on with their usual academic life.

KEYWORDS: sexual assault, performance, non-attendance, academic failure

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The spate of sexual assault in recent years is alarming and calls for urgent attention. Sexual assault is a broad term of abuse that encompasses all manner of unwanted sexual advances. (United Rights Council, 2014). It is a grave brutal crime that is not tolerated in any ideal society. Its pervasiveness in any society that survives on mutual trust like the tertiary institution is not defensible (Casteem, 2004).

Tertiary education involves all formal post-secondary education. It is viewed as a tool of promoting growth in all ramifications. Tertiary institutions are knowledge distribution centers, where knowledge is made available through the lecturers and even fellow students. These students are expected to be influenced in both character and learning. This gives rise to the declaration at students' graduation ceremonies, "being found worthy in character and in learning" (Kyoon, 2005). However, not only positive knowledge is impacted on the students but even negative knowledge and experiences are advertently and inadvertently inculcated on these students. Some of the negative influences culminate in immoral acts such as sexual assault which is becoming so rampant in the institutions of higher learning (Kaira & Bhugra, 2013). It is majorly engaged in by male perpetrators who "abuse a position of trust, authority and power" (12). The attackers are mainly close acquaintances of the victims like the relatives, neighbors, friends, school mates, lecturers and even husbands (Oladele, 1986).

The female students often fall victims of these nefarious acts because they are vulnerable to the patriarchal dominance of both the male lecturers and fellow students. When these assaults take place, the victims exhibit various kinds of traumatic behaviours which include mental health problems and avoidance of the predator or the environment that predisposes such behavior. There has been an association between sexual violence and mental health problems. These problems vary from post traumatic stress disorder, depression and substance abuse problem. This has proven that a great percentage of patients who use mental health facilities for help had experienced one form of sexual violence or the other (Sian, 2019). This paper presents that wrong sexual attraction,



relations, or contact with staff or peers on female students may considerably hinder such students from maximally participating in the academic or social functions organized either by the perpetrators or in the environment of the incidence, which is the campus. These predisposing traumatic experiences negatively affect students' academic performance and social integration. Lecturers and staff who insist on sexual indulgence from students in exchange for good grades or other favours end up scaring the students from the learning environment and prove irresponsible to their duty of motivating students into digging out their hidden potentials. It is at this juncture that the researchers deem it fit to examine the traumatic implications of sexual assault on the female students of selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

1.2 Statement of problem

Sexual assault is a regular recorded societal impropriety. The spate of this societal evil is worrisome and especially among the female folk due to power relations. Not only are the female sexually harassed, but many innocent girls have lost their lives in the hands of the perpetrators either in the bid of the perpetrators to eternally conceal their evil or as a result of trauma on the victims. It is increasingly being reported among students of higher institutions across the state. This development is distressing especially when such occurs in an environment that is supposed to be a citadel of learning cum a center of excellence where our future leaders are being molded. Against this backdrop, the researcher deems it fit to fill the academic gap in knowledge which has not been fully covered, by the examination of the diversities of female sexual assault the effects on the victims' academic performances.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the traumatic implications of sexual assault of female students on their academic performances

The specific objectives of the study was to :

- To assess the relationship between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures
- To examine the relationship between sexual assault and academic failure.

1.4 Significance of the study

The research will be significant to the readers and scholars as it will enlighten the minds on the trail, trend and the humiliating psychosexual impact of the assault on the vulnerable victims. The research findings will create a resource for further scholarly expedition. It will also spur the institutional managements into the development of interventions to curb the menace and also assist the victims.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study will cover sexual assault and its traumatic implications on female students of selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State. It examined the relationship between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures and the relationship between sexual assault and academic failure. The study will be carried out in three (3) selected tertiary institutions of the state. The target population was totally female students of these selected institutions.

2.1 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a form of gender discrimination that comprises unwelcome sexual overtures, demand for sexual favours and non-verbal or physical sexual demeanor from the victim (Willness, 2007). This is a Psycho-social issue that can unreasonably obstruct an individual's achievement because a frightening, unfriendly and unpleasant environment is created. Sexual assault has been observed to be an unwholesome tool wielded by men in the tertiary institutions against the female students. This is used either covertly or overtly by men to control the educational environment and achievements of the female victims.

Trauma

According to American Psychological Association, trauma is "an emotional response to a terrible event like accident, rape or natural disaster". It describes painful and overwhelming experiences which the victims find difficult to cope with, rather it renders the



victims powerless. It is usually shocking and causes psychological damage. Whatever occurrence that leaves one physically and emotionally frightened is enough to inflict trauma on the person (Herman, 1920).

Female Students

Female students are the young girls who attend higher education schools. Nigeria as a nation frantically needs strong human capital but also gender balanced competent workforce to achieve maintainable progressive and societal change in the nation. Female students of various tertiary institutions of this country have witnessed various forms of sexual harassment. These comprise humiliating verbal statements, unnecessary touching, and violent penetrations (Adedokun, 2004; Abati, 2006; Ejiogu&Onyene, 2006). Many female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria attest to having undergone these unwholesome sexual harassment from male staff and students. Campus sexual assault is a significant problem in Nigeria. These overtures and its attendant traumatic consequences eventually lead to the poor performance and or dropping out of some girls from tertiary institutions, thereby, reducing the workforce on the part of female gender.

Tertiary Institution

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are institutions offering higher and advanced forms of education in the nation's universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics (Komolafe Kazeem, 2019). These institutions are standard fora for actualization of peoples' life aspirations and achievement of the educational need of the country. Regrettably, these institutions are turning into "hostility arenas" as the morality of both staff and students is gradually being eroded. The environment has been plagued with high rate of sexual assault and with this; progressive academic excellence will become a thing of the past. This gender discrimination and sexual victimization affect women's full participation in academic activities. A gender friendly environment will provide a qualitative learning atmosphere thereby improving the academic achievement of all and sundry.

Traumatic Complexity

This reflects the shocking experiences involving numerous repressed activities that lead to interpersonal threats. Such events include shock, confusion, irritability, mood swings, anxiety, fear, withdrawals, difficulty concentrating, feeling of hopelessness and suicide.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work was anchored on Trauma Literary theory.

Trauma Literary Theory

Trauma theory originated from psychoanalytic theory as far as the 19th century when mental trauma was seen as the main reason for women hysteria (Ringel & Brandel, 2011). It emerged from various areas of social concern of the dominance of violence against women and children in form of rape and battering. These acknowledging violence attacks on women inflict psychic scars on them. Women have been part of the major research of trauma theorists for being so vulnerable to trauma especially in cases of sexual abuse.

Trauma literary theory is an interdisciplinary Western field of study developed through the mutual exchange of ideas and concepts in the humanities and psychology. It is a field that focuses on portraying mental shock in language and the depiction of the function of memory in forming cultural uniqueness. The concept of trauma is a source of analysis which is commonly understood as a harshly unsettling occurrence that intensely crashes the emotional unity and view of humanity. Trauma studies discover the effect of trauma in literary works and society by the assessment of the mental, symbolic and cultural importance. The study evaluates the intricate psychological and public issues that affect the idea of traumatic knowledge and how such happening figures and is figured by language.

Empirical Review

A number of related works have been done on sexual assault of female undergraduates in tertiary institutions and this includes; Banyard, Demers, Cohn, Edwards, Moynihan, Walsh, & Ward. (2020) used a sample of 6,482 undergraduate students from eight universities in New England to explore the relationship between sexual violence and academic outcomes in college students. This paper used both male and female population for their sample, although male participants made up only 34%. Academic outcomes were measured through the subscales from the College Persistence Questionnaire (Davidson et al., 2009), including academic efficacy, collegiate stress, institutional commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness. The findings showed that there was a



significant relationship between experienced unwanted sexual intercourse and all four subscales of academic outcomes. Specifically, sexual victimization was related to lower academic efficacy, higher collegiate stress, lower institutional commitment, and lower scholastic conscientiousness even after controlling for all other forms of victimization.

Wood, Voth Schrag, & Busch-Armendariz, (2020) examined the impact intimate partner violence (IPV) has on academic outcomes with a sample of 6,818 female students from a single university. In addition to investigating intimate partner sexual violence, they examined physical, psychological, and cyber violence, which are beyond the scope of this review. The authors measured sexual violence through the Sexual Experiences Survey Short Form Victimization (Koss et al., 2007). Wood and colleagues' results show that in the presence of other types of violence and control variables in the model, sexual violence accounts for unique variance in academic disengagement and absenteeism.

Duru and Aguodo (2018) examined the prevalence, pattern and determinants of sexual abuse of undergraduates in tertiary institutions. Descriptive cross sectional survey was used in the study. A sample size of six hundred female students was used implementing the multi-stage sampling technique. Data was collected by a pretested, semi-structural and self-administered questionnaire and analyzed by a computer software (EPI INFO version 3.3.2). The finding reveals that the prevalence of sexual abuse was high and recommendations of developmental of appropriate strategies to curb the menace against the women were made.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

3.2 Research Design:

This study adopted descriptive survey methods which will allow the researcher to accurately establish the traumatic impact on the students' academic performance. These methods are highly effective when uncomplicated description is desired that focuses on the details of what, where, when and why of an event or experience.

3.3 Area of Study

Anambra State, South East Nigeria was used as the area of study. It has boundaries with Imo State, Enugu State, Kogi and Delta States. The predominant and indigenous language spoken in the state is Igbo.

3.4 Sources of Data

The researchers drew the study data from primary and secondary

3.5 Study Population and Design

The study population comprised one thousand three hundred and seventy (1370) female undergraduate students of the selected institutions in Anambra State, which makes up the number of students from departments of mass communication faculty of Social sciences Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam (COOU) and Federal polytechnic Oko. The students were those in their second, third and final year in the institutions

S/N	INSTITUTION	NO. OF THOSE IN SECOND YR.	NO. OF THOSE IN THIRD YR	NO. OF THOSE IN FINAL YR	TOTAL
1	UNIZIK	89	92	115	296
2	COOU	48	53	73	174
3	OKO POLY	149	116	127	392
	TOTAL				896

Source, field survey, 2024

3.6 Data collection techniques

Data was collected through a well structured questionnaire which was distributed amongst female students in the defined department of the selected institutions. The affected students responded on questions relating to sexual assault and their academic performances which covered a period of one academic session



A total of 896 female undergraduates from the selected department and institutions were given questionnaires to fill, of these, 576 undergraduate students reported to have experienced one form of sexual assault or the other.

4.1 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 probability level of significance. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient is a widely used statistical method for measuring association between variables.

For the hypothesis, a null hypothesis was accepted where the obtained probability value (*p*-value) was greater than 0.05 but was rejected where it was less than 0.05.

4.2 Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures.

Table 4. 2.1 Test of Significance of Pearson’s Correlation between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures

Variables	N	sexual assault	non-attendance to lectures	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
sexual assault	576	1	.104	.000	Significant
non-attendance to lectures	576	.104	1		

As shown in Table 4.2.1, there was a significant relationship between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures, $r = 0.104$, p -value $< .05$. Since the p -value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not accepted. This implies that there was a significant relationship between sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between sexual assault and academic failure.

Table 4.2.2 Test of Significance of Pearson’s Correlation between sexual assault and academic failure.

Variables	N	Sexual assault	Academic failure	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
Sexual assault	576	1	.014	.001	Significant
Academic failure	576	.014	1		

Results displayed in Table4.2.2 shows that the relationship between Sexual assault and Academic failure was significant, $r = .014$, p -value < 0.05 . Since the p -value was less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was not accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In the preceding section of this chapter, the researcher presented and analyzed the results of this study using the objectives of the study as a guide.

Hypothesis one was tested with Correlation to explore the relationship between Sexual assault and non-attendance to lectures of female undergraduates of selected tertiary institutions in Anambra state. The result showed that Sexual assault significantly affect($r = 0.104$, $p = 0.000$, p -value < 0.05) non-attendance to lectures of female undergraduates of selected tertiary institutions in Anambra state, Nigeria. This finding is inline with the works of (Dworkin, 2020), which showed that these female lose confidence, have attendance issues, and struggle with unintended financial consequences, which contributes to poor academic outcomes and Wood, et al., (2020) which showed that sexual violence accounts for unique variance in academic disengagement and absenteeism,

Hypothesis two was tested with correlation to ascertain the relationship between Sexual assault and Academic failure of female undergraduates. The result showed that Sexual assault significantly affect($r = 0.014$; $p=0.001$; p -value $< .05$) Academic failure of female undergraduates of selected tertiary institutions in Anambra state. Findings of the current study is consonance with the study of Stermac et al. (2020) which shows that those who experienced completed assaults had more academic problems than those who



experienced attempted assault or nonconsensual touching and kissing and the works of Brewer and Thomas (2019) who noted that those who experienced sexual violence had higher scores of academic delay, academic failure, and academic nonattendance than those who did not experience sexual violence.

CONCLUSION

Sexual assault from the study show that it does not only have physical and psychological impact on the victims but also negatively impact academic outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that school management in Nigeria should:

1. Establish counseling units across all tertiary institutions with professional counselors employed to counsel victims as well as encouraging them to move on with their usual academic life.
2. Ensure that there is room for makeup quiz for affected victims this will help in alleviating the issue of failure

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

For further research:

1. The study should examine the traumatic impact of sexual assault on young male students
2. The study should expand beyond academic outcomes and explore the consequences sexual assault has on cognitive functioning generally

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