

# **PERCEIVED MAGNITUDE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN LEARNING INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF KENYA MEDICAL TRAINING COLLEGE, NAIROBI**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Harassment is any form of behavior whether verbal, non-verbal, or physical that embarrasses a person. It takes the form of sexual harassment, racial, personal, bullying, age and Stalking among others. Sexual harassment is therefore unwanted coercion for sexual favors. Although legislation, disciplinary and grievance procedures have been amended to deal with the issue in the workplace, this remains a hidden problem which warrants the need for a study to establish sexual harassment in learning institutions. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Kenya Medical Training College, Nairobi was chosen as the area of study with students and staff being the target population. The population was stratified into staff and students. Students' stratum was further stratified into 3 substrata (1st, 2nd, and 3rd years). The staff was further stratified into 2 substrata (teaching and non-teaching). The respondents were selected randomly from the substrata. The sample for the study was made up of 356 respondents. Questionnaires were used to collect data which was coded for analysis using SPSS. Both descriptive and inferential statistics

were analyzed. The quantitative data was interpreted in charts, tables, and graphs while qualitative data was presented in descriptive narration. Strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study to maintain ethical concerns. The findings showed that (57%) of the student's respondents have never experienced any form of sexual harassment while, (43%) have experienced some forms of sexual harassment that range from physical, verbal and non-verbal sexual violence. From the total number of students, 34% are aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment, whereas 66% are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment. The findings indicated that 73% of the staff have never experienced any form of sexual harassment whereas 27% have experienced some type of sexual harassment that ranges from physical, verbal and non-verbal sexual violence. 38% of the staff were aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment whereas 52% are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment.

**Key Words:** *Sexual harassment, Sexual forms, learning institutions, Kenya Medical Training College*

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to Stanko (2012), refers to sexual harassment as unwanted sexual attention which may take several forms including; visual, verbal, unwanted pressure for sexual favors, unwanted touching and pinching, physical assault, sexual assault, and rape. Victims of sexual harassment may be men or women. However, research by Flax (2012), stated that often in sexual harassment situations, women are normally the victims while men are the harassers. Sexual harassment is increasing in learning institutions. Research by Erulkar (2004), and Ruto and Chege (2006) conclude that 24% of sexual harassment occur in learning institutions. Studies show that women and girls are the likely victims of sexual harassment in comparison to boys and girls. Research by Erulkar (2004), Mbassa (2001), and Ruto and

Chege (2006) conclude the students are the main perpetrators of sexual harassment in schools following adults. Ruto and Chege (2006), concluded that Mwingi District out of 12 districts had the highest complains and incidents of sexual harassment. The study indicated that 60% of girls and 56% of boys were victims of sexual harassment. In support of Swartz (1998), the study reported that students with disabilities were the most vulnerable to sexual violence.

Terefe and Mengistu (1997), documented that high drop-out rates and low enrolment in secondary schools in Ethiopia were caused by sexual harassment and bullying. A study by Mbassa (2001), indicated that 16% of the 1688 surveyed students in Sub-Saharan Africa in Cameroon were victims of sexual harassment. 38% of the 422 girls interviewed in Botswana admitted to being sexually harassed (Mbassa, 2001). Lee et al. (1996) documents that sexual harassment affects academics, psychology, and behavior negatively. These, in turn, bring ineffectiveness in performance in schools. In spite of these extensive researches, little investigative attention has been paid to sexual harassment of teachers in either special needs or regular schools. Experience, formal and informal reports have shown that the female and male teachers in regular boys and girls boarding secondary schools respectively may be facing various forms of sexual harassment. For instance, students who have undergone rites of initiation/passage have been reported to view young teachers as their equals and try to exercise power over them, sometimes of sexual nature (Ruto & Chege, 2006). There is evidence of sexual harassment in learning institutions. Colleges and universities have been accused of promoting “sex for grades” phenomena where some lecturers have harassed female students when the students fail to submit to the lecturers’ sexual demands. Thus the need to research on sexual harassment at Kenya Medical Training College.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Sexual harassment in the workplace has been shrouded in silence, and there have been very few credible studies to date of problems affecting employees in the developing world (Williams, 2012). Sexual harassment in the workplace affects performance negatively resulting in high turnover, absenteeism, low productivity, increased complaints, and legal expenses (Glomb, 2007). A lot of research on sexual harassment in the workplace has been undertaken. Research by Glombo (2007), concluded that many sexual harassment cases in the workplace go unreported. The study suggests that the cases are not reported despite the availability of legislation and procedures in organizations to deal with sexual harassment cases. Anderson and Umberson (2001), explain that the most rampant cases of sexual harassment are in Pakistan, Thailand, Canada, and India. According to Collins (2010), 20% of 1837 women surveyed in China admitted to sexual harassment experience in the workplace. Julian (2008), documented that any sexual behavior at work was not acceptable by employees of a hospital in India. The study concluded that although inappropriate sexual behavior was unacceptable, it did happen in the hospital. Research by Wasilwa (2012), concluded that sexual harassment was perceived by employees as a way of gaining trust from supervisors paving the way for promotions. The study also reported on incidents of anxiety, embarrassment, and unproductivity as a result of sexual harassment in the workplace. Previous studies have mainly viewed sexual harassment in organizations from the perspective of the employees as victims of sexual harassment and have mainly been

conducted in regular organizations. The perspective of student and staff as victims of sexual harassment in schools has not been widely researched. Yet, achievement of school effectiveness demands, among others, a secure environment for students and staff, which in turn impacts positively on performance which warrants the need for the study to establish the sexual harassment in learning institutions in Kenya Medical Training Colleges, Nairobi.

## **GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

The main aim was to study the perceived magnitude of sexual harassment in learning institutions, a case study of Medical Training Colleges, Nairobi, Kenya.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **The Social Structure Theory**

Social structure theory is based on factors of social-economic stratification of the society (Merton, 1968). Violence is evident in lower social economic stratus who face many tribulations. The theory explains that states personality issues arise from poverty, illiteracy, infidelity, stress, unemployment, and isolation which are disadvantages faced by lower social economic status. In support of Merton (1968), Coser (1967), observes that the response by many individuals with lower social-economic status is through violence. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is attributed to the structure of a specific society. Thus learning institutions form a unique group with different frustrations and tribulations. The reason is that learning institutions are made up of students and staff from different socio-economic strata. Machera (2006), states that the social structure theory is suitable in explaining the forms of violence experienced in Kenyan media.

### **The Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory focusses on dominance and oppression and positions allocated to men and women within a society (Ruth, 1998). Patriarchal dominance is the root cause of gender-based violence in the society with respect to the feminist theory. The theory states that sexual harassment is observed as a way of maintaining patriarchy where the men benefit from women subordination (Connell, 1987). Ruth (1998), documents that a patriarchal society encourages male power, subordination by women, and inequality, thus, promoting sexual harassment.

Sexual violence is social oppression against women since, the society expects women to be inferior to men, and thus, women are not awarded equal rights and powers in the society (McCue, 2008). The feminist theory perceives sexual harassment as a system. The theory suggests that as long as equality is not practiced in both genders, sexual harassment will remain to be a societal problem. The society has established men to be powerful and women to be submissive. Following the tradition, girls at a tender age learn to be submissive victims while boys become the perpetrators.

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

### **Sexual Harassment**

According to Stanko (2012), sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behavior that can be either physical, verbal, or nonverbal. According to Stanko (2012), men support their behavior of sexual violence through power. Men in many organizations hold positions of power, hence, can fire a woman for refusing to submit sexually. Sexual harassment can affect both men and women, however, according to Flax (2012), men are usually the perpetrators while women are the victims in most cases.

Sexual harassment can either be quid pro quo or sexual harassment. Quid pro quo where a person holding a powerful position suggests sexual favors. Quid pro quo relates to exchange for favors between two people, one of whom has the power to hire, promote, or fire the victim. Sexual harassment refers to inappropriate sexual behavior leading to discomfort sexual harassment is often viewed as a 'grey area' (Dansky, 2012), since many people do not talk about it. Sexual harassment range from being trivial to extremely offensive. Till (2010), suggested that sexual harassment was divided into five; Gender harassment refers to sexually offensive jokes made in terms of gender. Seductive behavior involves inappropriate behavior leading to sexual favors such as flirtation. Sexual bribery, coercion, and imposition involve threats made in exchange for sexual favors. Gruber (2012), categorized sexual harassment into three; verbal requests, comments, and non-verbal displays. Harassment using electrical means is on the rise. The reason is that many people are using electrical devices. The percentage of men and women using the internet is 68% and 66% respectively (LeClaire, 2013). A study by Khoo and Senn's (2014) found that women find most sexually suggestive emails to be more offensive in comparison to men who find them enjoyable. Thus, gender is vital in identifying the perception of men and women concerning emails (Russell, 2012).

### **Factors Contributing to Sexual Harassment**

The causes of sexual harassment are explained theoretically using four models; the natural, organizational, social-cultural, and sex role spillover model. The natural model is based on the assumption that human sexuality is extended in the workplace, thus leading to sexual harassment. The model's ideology is that the strong sexual drive of men makes them aggressive at work since they are attracted to women (Tangri & Hayes, 2007). The organizational model assumes that the hierarchical power in the workplace leads to sexual violence. The sociocultural model indicates that sexual harassment is encouraged by the male dominance in the society (Sczesny, 2007). The sex-role spillover model attributes sexual harassment to the character expected of women and men in the workplace. The model documents that women are perceived as sexual while men as asexual.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive research design the target population of the study was 356 students and staff from KMTC. Stratified sampling was adopted to categorize the target population into two strata. Open and closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect

primary data. The response rate was 249 (99.3%) students and 25 (60%) staff. The response rate was above average with respect to the minimum threshold of 30% suggested by Kothari (2004). The data was entered into Microsoft Excel and later transferred to SPSS for analysis. After analysis, the qualitative findings were presented in descriptive narration while the quantitative data were interpreted using table, graphs, and charts.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

### **Student Sexual Harassment**

The study shows that (57%) of the student's respondents' have never experienced any form of sexual harassment while, (43%) have experienced some forms that range from physical sexual violence, verbal and non-verbal sexual violence. From the responses 41.3% of the student respondents have experienced verbal sexual Harassment, 37.5% of the student respondents have experienced non- verbal sexual harassment, and finally, 21.2% have experienced physical sexual Harassment. This agreed with a study by Erulkar (2004), and Ruto and Chege (2006), which indicates the existence of sexual harassment in learning institutions and Johnstone (2003) showed that 24% of sexual harassment took place in school learning settings.

Responses on the Physical Forms of Sexual Harassment showed the experiences of Sexual assault (e.g. rape), (15.9%) of the students reported that they had such an experience. However, the majority (84.1%) of the students had no experience. The forms commonly experienced were 32.2% having had their body parts touched without their consent, while 67.8% the majority, had not experienced sexual touch without their consent (consented) and on forceful kissing, 33.7% of the respondents had experienced it, while, the majority (66.3%) of students had not experienced.

For the Non-Verbal Forms of Sexual Harassment most of the students 61% have never received e-mails that had explicit sexual messages, 51% of the students had not experienced display of sexual gestures like finger signs or winking, 55% of the students reported that they have never experienced sexual/pornographic materials (including magazines with nude pictures) being displayed for them to see without their consent and finally 53% of the students had experienced exposure of body parts that are to be kept private.

Unwelcome sexual advances, Harassment via phone: It was established in the study that there was harassment via phone calls. 47.5% of the students indicated that they had received phone calls that were sexually insulting while 52.5% of the female teachers had not experienced the same. Rumor about lifestyle: 49.8% of students responded that they had heard rumors being spread about their purported sexual lives whereas 50.2% disagreed

Finally, the Verbal Forms of Sexual Harassment, A bigger fraction of the students (55.5%) had experienced unwelcome sexual suggestions, comments and advances. On the contrary, a bigger fraction (52.5%) of the female students had not experienced harassment via phone calls. 50.2% of the students disagreed that they had heard rumors being spread about their purported sexual lives. Finally, 54.5% of students had been victims of Whistling and making

sexual sounds form of sexual harassment. Finally, 59.3% of the students reported to have been victims of insulting jokes that had sexual connotations.

Female fellow students in college were the greatest perpetrators of physical form of Sexual harassment (36.7%), the greatest perpetrators of verbal form of Sexual harassment (37.2%) and also were the greatest perpetrators of Non-verbal Forms of Sexual Harassment (45.4%). Class rooms (62%) are the safest places in terms of sexual harassment which is followed by the hostels (53%) then staff quarters (51%), playfields (37%) and finally on the way to and from college (26.5%). Whereas on the way to and from college is always unsafe place (17.1%), followed by the play fields (10.9%) then staff quarters (9.2%), hostels (8.3%) and finally classroom (5.1%) is safe. From the total number of the students, 34% are aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment whereas 66% are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment. This implies that majority of the respondents are not aware of where to report any case of sexual harassment.

Assessing the effects of sexual harassments on students 44.7% said it affected academics very much while 21.7% reported a bit, and 33.6% perceived that it did not affect them academically. Students admitted to sexual harassment affecting them socially. 32.6% very much, 37.1% a bit, and 30.3% perceived that it did not affect them socially. The students also reported some psychological effects. Its effects on psychology were as follows, 44.5% perceived that sexual harassment affected them very much, 27.7% a bit and finally 27.7% perceived that it did not affect them. The results were similar to Lee et al. (1996), concluded that sexual harassment affects negatively on academics, psychology, and behavior.

### **Staff Sexual Harassment**

A greater fraction of the staff (73%) have never experienced any form of sexual harassment whereas 27% have experienced varying forms of sexual harassment that range from physical sexual violence, verbal and non-verbal sexual violence. Physical sexual Harassment (41%) is the most common form of sexual harassment experienced by the staff whereas, non-verbal sexual Harassment (30.9%) is the second most common form of sexual harassment experienced by the staff and finally, verbal sexual Harassment (28%) is the least common form of sexual harassment experienced by the staff. Female students in college (53%) were the greatest perpetrators of Sexual harassment followed by the male fellow staff in college (19%). Thereafter Male students and departmental heads (14%) respectively. Of the total number of the staff, 38% are aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment whereas 52% are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment implying that a majority of the staff are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **Student Sexual Harassment**

A greater fraction of the students have never experienced any form of sexual harassment. For those that have experienced sexual harassment, the common form is verbal followed by non-

verbal, and physical sexual violence. A bigger proportion of the students are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment

### **Staff Sexual Harassment**

A greater fraction of the staff has never experienced any form of sexual harassment. Physical sexual harassment is the most common form of violence experienced by staff followed by non-verbal and verbal violence respectively. Of the total number of the staff, the majority of them are not aware of where to report any case of Sexual Harassment.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher recommended the establishment of trust and understanding between the students and teachers at Kenya Medical Training College to prevent episodes of sexual harassment in the institution. Another recommendation was the establishment of a task force of joint efforts to formulate gender relations policy spelling out regulations and cross-referral systems between the KMTC and law enforcement agents. Lastly, establishment of a gender relations office at the KMTC headquarters that shall coordinate all sexual harassment or gender discrimination in the institution.

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