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Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between Sexual Harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. Correlation research design was used for the study. Two research objectives, research questions and hypotheses were used for this study. The population was 47,813 and a sample of 380 was used for the study. Multistage sampling procedure was used to compose the sample. Two research questions were answered while two hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance. Two instruments were used to collect data- Students' Sexual Harassment Questionnaire (SSHQ) and Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ). SSHQ was made up of 10 items on verbal and physical sexual harassment while APQ contained 20 items on academic performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions on the basis of the values of r (coefficient of correlation) and also test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance by comparing the p -value (probability values). The finding from the study shows that there is a significant negative relationship between verbal sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary schools' students. It also revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between physical sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary schools' students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. It was recommended among others- that school administrators and teachers should establish clear anti-harassment policies and awareness campaigns to discourage verbal sexual harassment in schools. The study concluded that verbal and physical sexual harassment hinders students' academic performance.

Key words: Sexual Harassment, Verbal Sexual Harassment, Physical Sexual Harassment, Academic Performance

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is the measurable outcomes of students' educational engagement, often assessed through examinations, continuous assessment, and standardized tests. It reflects not only mastery of school subjects but also the ability to apply knowledge and skills in solving academic tasks. In the Nigerian secondary school system, academic performance holds particular significance as it determines students' eligibility for further education and access to career opportunities. A minimum benchmark is the attainment of at least five credits which serve as compulsory entry requirements into tertiary institutions and professional training programs. Beyond institutional requirements, strong academic performance enhances students' self-confidence, social mobility, and lifelong learning capacity (Okorie, 2019). For senior secondary students, performance is a reflection of their readiness to meet societal and national expectations in human capital development. However, the importance of academic performance is underscored by the general underperformance among senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. According to a report obtained from the Education Resource Centre, Niger State, the percentage of students who obtained at least five credits declined steadily from 41% in 2020, to 35% in 2021, and in 2022, it was 29%. It further decline to 25% in 2023 and to 19% in 2024. This decline may be associated with sexual harassment- specifically verbal sexual harassment and physical sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment within the school environment is a pervasive issue and a thing of concern. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwelcome sexual advance, request, or conduct of a sexual nature that interferes with an individual's dignity, work, or learning environment (Fitzgerald, 2018). It encompasses a range of unwelcome behaviors- verbal, non-verbal, and physical- that exploit students' vulnerability and create an unsafe learning environment. For students, school should serve as a protective space for intellectual and personal development, but harassment often disrupts this process by fostering fear, anxiety, and withdrawal. Students who experience harassment may lose focus in class, reduce their participation in academic activities, and develop poor attitudes toward schoolwork. Over time, this contributes to declining examination outcomes and limits students' chances of meeting educational benchmarks such as obtaining five credits. Oluwole, (2019) opined that sexual harassment among adolescents increases psychological distress, thereby diminishing their academic engagement and aspirations. In Niger South Senatorial District, where performance has fallen significantly in recent years, sexual harassment may be one of the contributing factors, as it reduces students' concentration and confidence. Beyond individual harm, its effects extend to systemic underachievement, with the educational environment becoming unsafe and less supportive of learning.

Verbal sexual harassment refers to unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or remarks that create discomfort or hostility, undermining an individual's dignity and emotional well-being within social, educational, or workplace environments (McDonald, 2019). It is one of the most prevalent forms experienced by senior secondary students and includes suggestive statements, sexually explicit jokes, and intrusive verbal advances. Such behaviours disrupt the learning atmosphere by generating embarrassment, anxiety, and distraction among

victims. Tanko (2016) maintained that students who are repeatedly exposed to verbal harassment often develop poor concentration habits, which negatively affect their performance in examinations and continuous assessments. Beyond psychological distress, the academic consequences are evident, as affected students may withdraw from classroom interactions or deliberately avoid certain subjects, teachers, or school spaces associated with such experiences. This withdrawal significantly reduces their chances of attaining the required credits for academic progression. Ahmed (2020) further noted that persistent verbal harassment weakens students' self-confidence and creates a sense of insecurity that interferes with cognitive functioning and learning engagement. In Niger South Senatorial District, the prevalence of such hostile interactions may partly explain declining academic outcomes, as students become less motivated and less participatory in academic activities. Over time, this not only affects immediate academic achievement but also lowers students' aspirations for higher education and personal development, often escalating into more severe forms such as physical sexual harassment.

In the same vein, physical sexual harassment is more intrusive and damaging, involving unwanted physical contact, groping, coercion, or demands for sexual favors. In senior secondary schools, such experiences deeply undermine students' sense of safety and trust in the educational system. Oludele (2022) opined that victims of physical sexual harassment often develop avoidance behaviors, including skipping classes, staying away from certain teachers, or withdrawing from peer groups. This absenteeism and emotional trauma directly affect learning outcomes, as students lose valuable instructional time and preparation for examinations. The trauma associated with physical harassment also lowers concentration and disrupts students' ability to perform effectively and participate in classroom activities which are essential for meeting academic benchmarks. According to Eze, (2021) exposure to physical sexual harassment has a significant negative effect on both the mental health and academic performance of students, reducing motivation and increasing dropout risks. In Niger South Senatorial District, where academic performance has dropped from 41% in 2020 to 19% in 2024, such experiences may partly explain the trend.

Despite government effort through educational programs such as introduction of safe school initiative, the researcher has observed that the issues of sexual harassment and consistent underperformance among senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria still persist. Annually, many students struggle to obtain the required five credits in basic subjects, including Mathematics and English which may be linked to the prevalence of sexual harassment- particularly verbal and physical forms. Such experiences disrupt concentration, lower self-esteem, and hinder classroom participation, which can lead to academic underperformance. It is against this background that this study examined the relationship between sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria.

Objectives

The study examined the relationship between sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary schools students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. Specifically,

1. to examine the relationship between verbal sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria
2. to determine the relationship between physical sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between verbal sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between physical sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance for this study:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between verbal sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between physical sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

METHOD

The study used a correlation survey research design. Correlation survey research design examines the degree and direction of the relationship between two or more variables without exerting control over them. It is particularly valuable in educational and social research where manipulating sensitive variables such as sexual harassment would be neither ethical nor feasible. According to Shona and McCombes (2022), correlation design enables researchers to determine how two variables are related and whether variations in one is associated with changes in the other. They emphasize that while this design uncovers patterns and associations, it does not prove causality. The correlation design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to investigate whether experiences of sexual harassment significantly relate to the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District.

The population of the study comprised 47,813 SS 2 students from 449 public senior secondary schools from Niger South Senatorial District (source: Niger State Ministry of Education Board 2024). The sample size of this study is 380 SS 2 students from 10 public

senior secondary schools in Niger South Senatorial District, Nigeria; it was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of determining sample size of a given population. The sample size was drawn using multistage sampling procedure. It began with the clustering of the eight (8) Local Government Areas that formed Niger North Senatorial District of Niger State. This was followed by the use of simple random sampling technique (Lucky dip) in the picking of 5 Local Government Areas. Systematic random sampling technique of the interval of 2 was used in selecting the 10 schools. Thereafter, proportionate sampling techniques was used to select the sample of 380 SS 2 students among the 10 public senior secondary schools under Niger South Senatorial District.

The study employed two self-developed instruments: Students' Sexual Harassment Questionnaire (SSHQ) and Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ). The SSHQ consisted of 10 items, with items 1–5 assessing students' experiences of verbal sexual harassment and items 6–10 measuring physical sexual harassment. The APQ contained 20 items, carefully designed to assess students' overall academic performance, including classroom participation, assignment completion, test scores, and general learning engagement. Both instruments were structured on a four-point rating scale with the following response options: SA = Strongly Agree (4 points), A = Agree (3 points), D = Disagree (2 points), and SD = Strongly Disagree (1 point). Joshi et al., (2015) opined that four-point rating scales are widely recognized as effective for measuring behavioral and psychological constructs.

The two instruments were validated by experts in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The validation process emphasized face and construct validity to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. According to Taherdoost (2016), expert judgment represents a credible method of establishing the content and construct validity of research instruments. Following this process, the SSHQ obtained a logical validity index of 0.81, while the APQ yielded a validity index of 0.79, confirming both instruments as suitable for measuring sexual harassment and academic performance among senior secondary school students.

To determine the reliability of the instruments, a trial testing was conducted with 20 students drawn from two senior secondary schools within the study area but excluded from the main sample. The pilot study was carried out at Government Senior Secondary School, Bida and Government Model Secondary School, Suleja, both located in Niger South Senatorial District. The data collected were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and the reliability analysis obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.78 for SSHQ and 0.87 for APQ, demonstrating high reliability and confirming their suitability for the main study.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions on the basis of the values of r (coefficient of correlation). Any correlation coefficient value below 0.50 was considered low while those above it was considered high. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance by comparing the p -value (probability values) of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) obtained from SPSS application with the significance level at 0.05. For hypotheses whose p -values were less than 0.05, they were rejected while for those greater than 0.05 they were accepted.

RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation between verbal sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

Variables	N	\bar{X}	Std.D	df	r	Remark
verbal sexual harassment	380	3.11	1.76	379	-0.719	Negative correlation
Academic Performance	380	2.88	1.70			

Table 1 shows the correlation between verbal sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. The result revealed responses from 380 students with a degree of freedom (df) of 379. The mean scores for verbal sexual harassment and academic performance are 3.11 and 2.88, with corresponding standard deviations of 1.76 and 1.70, respectively. The correlation coefficient (r) is -0.719 , which is below the benchmark value of 0.50 and indicates a strong negative relationship. This implies that higher levels of verbal sexual harassment are significantly associated with lower academic performance among senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation between verbal sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

Variables	N	\bar{X}	Std.D	Df	r	r ²	P-value	Decision
verbal sexual harassment	380	3.11	1.76	379	-	0.517	0.000	Reject
Academic Performance	380	2.88	1.70		0.719			

Level of significance Alpha (α) < 0.05 shows significant relationship

Table 2 shows the relationship between verbal sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. The result revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.719$, $r^2 = 0.517$, and a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative relationship between verbal sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlation between physical sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

Variables	N	\bar{X}	Std.D	Df	r	Remark
problem-solving ability	380	3.01	1.73	379	-0.773	Negative correlation
Mental Health	380	2.88	1.70			

Table 3 presents the correlation between physical sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. The result was based on responses from 380 students with a degree of freedom (df) of 379. The mean scores for physical sexual harassment and academic performance are 3.01 and 2.88, with corresponding standard deviations of 1.73 and 1.70, respectively. The correlation coefficient (r) is -0.773 , which falls below the benchmark value of 0.50. This implies that higher levels of physical sexual harassment are significantly associated with lower academic performance among senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Correlation between physical sexual harassment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Schools Students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

Variables	N	\bar{X}	Std.D	Df	r	r ²	P-value	Decision
Phy. sexual harassment	380	3.01	1.73	379	-	0.596	0.003	Reject
Academic Performance	380	2.88	1.70		0.773			

Level of significance Alpha (α) < 0.05 shows significant relationship

Table 4 presents the relationship between physical sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. The result revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.773$, $r^2 = 0.596$, and a p-value of 0.003 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative relationship between physical sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The finding on hypothesis one revealed a significant negative relationship between verbal sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. This finding aligns with Dennis (2021), who reported that constant exposure to verbal sexual harassment such as name-calling and inappropriate remarks undermined students' concentration and reduced their classroom participation. It was further supported by Adamu and Emmanuel (2020), whose study found that verbal harassment in schools disrupted students' self-esteem and academic focus, thereby lowering performance. In a related study, Thompson (2019) observed that adolescents who experienced persistent verbal abuse in learning environments exhibited declining grades and diminished motivation to succeed academically. Similarly, Okoye (2022) highlighted that verbal intimidation and harassment in Nigerian secondary schools fostered psychological distress that interfered with students' ability to meet academic expectations. Likewise, Martinez (2021) confirmed that verbal harassment in classroom settings across Latin American schools significantly contributed to absenteeism, poor engagement, and reduced examination outcomes. Also, Tanko, (2016) asserted that students

subjected to frequent verbal harassment often struggle with concentration, leading to poor academic outcomes.

The finding on hypothesis two revealed a significant negative relationship between physical sexual harassment and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. This result is consistent with Suleiman (2022), who discovered that physical forms of sexual harassment such as unwelcome touching and coercion heightened emotional distress and directly interfered with learning outcomes. Similarly, Omneh and Ude (2021) reported that students who suffered physical harassment in schools were more likely to avoid academic spaces, leading to absenteeism and poor academic records. Correspondingly, Fletcher (2018) noted that victims of physical sexual harassment displayed increased psychological trauma, which translated into reduced cognitive engagement and lower academic achievement. In addition, Hassan and Okorie (2019) found that persistent exposure to physical harassment undermined students' concentration, thereby lowering examination performance and class participation. Likewise, Oludele (2022) who found that victims of physical sexual harassment often develop avoidance behaviors, including skipping classes, staying away from certain teachers, or withdrawing from peer groups. This absenteeism and emotional trauma directly affect learning outcomes, as students lose valuable instructional time and preparation for examinations.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that sexual harassment, both verbal and physical, have affect academic performance of senior secondary school students in Niger South Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. Verbal harassment undermines students' self-esteem, focus, and motivation, while physical harassment compounds emotional distress, absenteeism, and poor classroom engagement. Together, these experiences weaken students' academic outcomes and hinder their overall development. The findings affirm that creating a safe and supportive school environment is essential for sustaining students' academic success and protecting their well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. School administrators and teachers should establish clear anti-harassment policies and awareness campaigns to discourage verbal sexual harassment in schools. This will foster a respectful learning atmosphere, reduce fear, and allow students to focus on their academic goals.
2. School authorities should strengthen counselling services and reporting mechanisms to address cases of physical sexual harassment promptly and effectively. Providing safe channels for students to seek support will help reduce trauma, encourage school attendance, and improve academic performance.

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