

# **The Effects of Sex-for-Grade Practice in Higher Educational Institutions in Edo State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** This study was designed to examine the effects of sex-for-grade practice in tertiary institutions and its implications for higher education in Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered to seven hundred and twenty students and ninety lecturers in Edo State. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used. A Cronbach alpha value of .870 was obtained for reliability. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test. The results from the presentation showed that endless trauma, low self-esteem, and depression are some of the effects of sexual harassment on its victims. Based on the findings of this work, it was recommended that students who are victims of sexual harassment should visit counselors and psychologists for professional counsel. Faculty members who perpetrate sexual harassment should be suspended and guilty students should be expelled.

**Keywords:** Counselling, Student support, Sex-for-grade, higher education, Nigeria

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## **1. Introduction**

Addressing the issue of sex-for-grade practices in higher educational institutions in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach, and education policy plays a critical role in this effort (Ikpuri, 2018). Sex-for-grade is a deeply entrenched problem that involves educators exploiting their power over students in exchange for sexual favors. In every open social institution where there are males and females, there is bound to be interaction among them, and such interaction could either be positive or negative. Sexual harassment could therefore be a product of such negative interaction among males and females, which may have far-reaching implications for individuals and the nation at large.

In recent times, there have been public outbursts on the falling standard of higher education in Nigeria. There are several opinions that Nigerian students as integral parts of the higher education process handle academics with levity, thus relying on other means of passing examinations, one of which is by exchanging sex for good grades. Research also suggests that the main perpetrators of sex-for-grade in Nigerian tertiary institutions are both academic and non-academic staff. Gender-based violence and sexual harassment in education have increasingly become important topics of discussion as more females enter the arena of education at all levels.

Sexual harassment is not only seen as the satisfaction of sexual desire but also a power manifestation. This creates negative images of females particularly as learners. Directly and indirectly, sexual harassment has adverse effects on the victim's psychological well-being. This study examines the effects of sex-for-grade practice as well as strategic methods to control sexual harassment in tertiary institutions.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

The following research questions have been raised to guide this study:

1. What are the effects of the sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions?
2. What are the strategies for the effective control of sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

### **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to examine the sex-for-grade practice in tertiary institutions and its implications for higher education in Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Find out the effects of sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
2. Suggest strategies for the effective control of sex-for-grade practice in tertiary institutions.

## **2. Literature Review**

Sex-for-grade practice in higher educational institutions is a deeply concerning and unethical phenomenon that occurs in many parts of the world, including Nigeria (Obianyo, 2021). It refers to situations where educators, typically professors or lecturers, exploit their positions of authority and power to demand sexual favors from students in exchange for favorable academic grades, recommendations, or other educational benefits (Enyia et al., 2023). This practice is a gross violation of professional ethics, human rights, and the dignity of students, and it has serious implications for both the individuals involved and the educational system.

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This research work is hinged on the Social Exchange Theory. The Social Exchange Theory states that for any benefit an individual receives, an equivalent benefit should be returned at one point. This theory was developed by Thibaut and Kelly in 1959. It is a relationship maintenance theory which looks at how people arrive at their decisions in relationships. The key tenet of this theory is that human behavior is in essence an exchange in which people seek out options with the best profit or reward. People establish relationships because they expect some kind of reward in these relationships (Ikpuru, 2023). The sole aim is to pursue that which gives pleasure and gain. This explains why a sixty-year-old man who knows the consequences of going to bed with a sixteen-year-old girl, the possibility of contracting AIDS, losing his job and self-respect if caught in the act still goes on to do it. For him, nothing is more gainful at that particular point in time than satisfying his sexual urge.

On the other hand, a sixteen-year-old female student who allows herself to be ravished by her lecturer may not do it for sexual satisfaction. For her, having good grades in exchange for her action is of more benefit. Supporting this, a study carried out by Imasogie (2002) to investigate the prevalence of sexual harassment at Olabisi Onabanjo University found out that many female students felt that they will gain more if they agree to a male lecturer's requests for sex as long as the act brings academic success. This may be why Smart (2021) sees sexual harassment as a violent crime not as an act of passion. This is because most times the motive of the harasser who presses the victim to have sex, may not be for sexual gratification rather, the motive is to control and gain power over the victim. Perpetrators do not usually have regard for their victims. They only seek to fulfill their desires.

## **2.2 Effects of Sexual Harassment**

The incidence of sex harassment is seldom reported (Imonikhe, Idogho, and Aluede, 2011). In the school system, there are implicit and explicit coercive sexual behaviour that are used to control, influence, or affect the educational opportunities, grades, and / or learning environment of a student. These include withholding or threatening to withhold grades earned or deserved, submitting, or threatening to submit an undeserved performance evaluation, denying or threatening to deny a scholarship recommendation or college application.

Thus, experiencing sexual harassment can have negative effects in a victim's psychological and physical health (Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997). Problematic reactions include anger, reduced self-esteem, loss of confidence, depression, anxiety, psychological trauma, and powerlessness on the part of the victims. Victims may also have difficulty in their personal relationships and in sexual adjustment (loss of desire, for example). Sexual harassment in an educational institution often leads to lack of concentration in school, which eventually results in poor academic performance of the victim. It can also produce fallout on the jobs. For females who are harassed, it may lead them to become less productive, less satisfied with their jobs and less committed to their work compared to those who do not experience sexual harassment.

Studies on sexual harassment of students have established that sexual harassment is a pervasive and persistent form of violence experienced often on a regular basis by the majority of females. For example, the study by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (1994) found that over 80% of the female students surveyed had been sexually harassed by another student and 20% of them by school staff. The study also revealed that about 1% of boys had also been sexually harassed. The range of sexual harassment reported within school setting was extensive. The ranges included sexual comments, jokes, gestures, touch and pinched in sexual way.

In all the cases, girls reported more serious and negative impacts on their school performance than did the boys. These impacts included difficulty in concentration, fear, ill at ease, lowered self-esteem and lower grades. A similar study of four Nigerian universities revealed that students identified sexual harassment as being among the stressors hindering academic work (Ladebo, 2001). Too often, sexual harassment is viewed by students, lecturers, staff and parents as just part of life. Denial, dismissal and minimization are different excuses used by the public to mask the reality of sexual harassment (Ikpuru, 2023; Kopels & Dupper, 1999). Cases of sexual harassment are not often reported for fear of victimization and stigmatization.

Assault, bullying, exploitation, and intimidation are vices that play out in the sexual encounter, leaving the victims with long-term pains that devastate their psychological well-being. Incidence of sexual harassment is not always reported. This makes it possible for perpetrators to go free. This is responsible for the unchecked reoccurrence of the behavior deficit. Sexually harassed individuals can suffer through a number of psychological effects, ranging from irritation and frustration to anxiety, stress, and trauma. The impact of sexual harassment on the victim is dependent on the situation; this ranges from mild annoyance to severe psychological damage, causing significant negative impact on the career of the victim (Schuffer, 2000).

Other psychological symptoms of sexual harassment include excessive guilt and shame, persistent sadness, compulsive thoughts, negative outlook, irritability, mood swings, impulsivity, emotional flooding, diminished self-confidence, decreased concentration, anxiety, fears of loss of control, escape fantasies, rage

episodes, obsessional fears, crying spells, persistent anger and fear, decreased self-esteem, self-doubt, feelings of humiliation, helplessness, vulnerability, and alienation. The general stress process model posits that the frequency and severity of harassment are key predictors of mental health and well-being, and that personal vulnerability moderates the association between harassment and its negative outcomes. Sexual harassment undermines the integrity of the academic environment, and it prevents its victims from achieving their full potential.

For instance, graduates who obtained certificates through favors or sexual consent are not worth the certificates they have been conferred. This is obvious in the performance of the half-baked graduates produced into the labor market in recent times. Many seasoned academics in whom many resources of the nation have been expended have had their careers terminated through cases of sexual harassment. Their images and those of their family members are often tarnished within the immediate environment.

In most cases, the consequences for female victims can be reflected in psychological pains, revulsion, or hatred towards the harasser or other men around them. Victims often feel cheap, dirty, and vulnerable. In the same vein, sexual harassment can threaten a student's physical and emotional well-being, influence how well a student performs in school, and make it difficult for the student to achieve her career goals. In addition, the memory often remains; it continues to trigger a feeling of depression that can make the victim develop a withdrawal syndrome, particularly from men with long-term impact on decision to be married (Taiwo et al, 2014).

The effect of sexual harassment on a student's academic progress and attainment of future goals can be significant and should not be underestimated. As a result of sexual harassment, a student may have trouble in learning or drop out of school, lose trust in school officials, become isolated, nurse constant fear for personal safety and have low self-esteem which may prevent the student from achieving her maximum potential. By extension, sexual harassment negatively affects the productivity and economic development of a nation due to poorly skilled employees who create problems for the labor market. It has been observed that those who have been victims of sexual harassment before may react more negatively than first-time targets because past experience diminishes one's ability to cope (Fitzgerald et al, 1997).

Indeed, psychologists and social workers report that severe/chronic sexual harassment can have the same psychological effects as rape or sexual assault. (Koss, 1987) For example, in 1995, Judith Coflin committed suicide after chronic sexual harassment by her bosses and co-workers. (Her family was later awarded 6 million dollars in punitive and compensatory damages.) Backlash and victim-blaming can further aggravate the effects. Moreover, every year, sexual harassment costs hundreds of millions of dollars in lost educational and professional opportunities, mostly for girls and women (Boland, 2002).

Ogunbameru, (2006) highlights some of the effects of sexual harassment, particularly in the academia. They include:

- Victims may feel powerless to stop the situation. It is common to fear retaliation, for example with grades or recommendations. They fear that their complaints will not be taken seriously, or that they will be perceived as causing trouble.
- Victims often blame themselves, and fear that others will also blame them, even though it is the harasser's authority or influence that has been misused.
- Victims often change academic plans. They may drop courses, change institution/majors, drop out of school, change residence, avoid advisers, or neglect academic commitments or responsibilities to avoid a harasser.
- Victims often have physical symptoms of stress, such as stomach problems or headaches. They may also become depressed, moody, or irritable without knowing why.
- Victims will often suffer lower self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence.
- Victims are often confused about what is happening and/or what can be done about it.

### **2.3 Control of Sexual Harassment on Campus**

Reliance on friends and close relatives has been a major coping strategy employed by various victims of sexual harassment (Gutek & Koss, 1993). This is also supported by the study conducted by Stockdale (2006) which revealed that, contrary to conventional wisdom, victims of sexual harassment who used confrontational coping strategies tended to experience worse outcomes than did others. Furthermore, the use of confrontational coping strategy tended to amplify associations between harassment pervasiveness and consequences, especially for men. Researchers have theorized that culture and societal values heavily influence social-support mobilization (Keinan, 1997). In Turkey, it was documented that sexually harassed women who did not fear blame often coped by relying on their male support network—fathers, brothers, husbands, relatives or friends of higher status to intervene in the situation and step in as protectors (Stockdale 2006).

According to past Anglo-American research, avoidance is the most prevalent responses to sexual harassment. That is, a common strategy for many targets is to avoid the perpetrator or the harassing context if possible (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Another strategy for curbing sexual harassment, especially in tertiary institutions is investigative journalism. For UNESCO (2009), investigative journalism examines issues that are hidden from the public, and this can either be done deliberately or unintentionally by someone who occupies a position of power over other people.

Investigative journalism can be a very effective tool in bringing to light sexual harassment cases in tertiary institutions, thereby reducing the rate of impunity in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Although untapped in Sub-Saharan Africa, this form of journalism can be an essential weapon in revealing assault cases. Traditionally, investigative reporting has been at the forefront of media that cause the most lasting change and anticipated reform. Hence, it is vital to the development and reformation of the university system. Accordingly, through investigative journalism, unethical, immoral and illegal behaviour by lecturers, students as well as administrative staff can be exposed.

In a research conducted in southwestern part of Nigeria, of the eight rape victims who were interviewed in depth, only two had revealed the incident to anyone (Ajuwon 2005). Also, Ellsberg, Winkvist and Pena (2001) reported as further difficulty, that women are typically more reluctant to discuss sexual harassment or abuse by non-partners than by partners and therefore special methods are needed to encourage disclosure.

Lecturers found culpable should be named and shamed to serve as deterrent to others. The lecturers should be suspended and if it's a student's fault, the student should also be suspended. There should be enough sensitization to be able to empower women to be bold and report these lecturers. When the lecturers know that the students will report them, they will minimize and eventually stop harassing female students. Female students should do their best in studies and that would be a proof to their good grades. There should be flexibility in laws and ladies are encouraged to report such issues without victimization from other lecturers. There should also be good supervision of lecturers and open communication channels between students and school authorities.

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The survey method involved the use of a questionnaire. The researcher decided to make use of the survey method because it provides a high level of general capability in representing the study population (Ikpuru, 2023). The population for this study consisted of 10,200 students and 1,779 teaching staff of the University of Benin, Benin City and the Federal Polytechnic, Auchi. This population captured students studying for bachelor's degrees and Diplomas in Edo State. The data gathered from this population mirrored the rate of sex-for-grade practice in public universities and polytechnics in Edo State.

For the composition of students and academic staff subjects, the first step involved random sampling of three faculties/schools in each of the tertiary institutions through balloting. The second step involved sampling three departments in each of the sampled faculties/schools. In each of the departments, 5 lecturers were sampled randomly, and 40 students were sampled purposively from Year II/200 level and above, using proportionate stratified random sampling procedure. The sample size was composed of a total of 720 students and 90 lecturers in the University of Benin, Benin City and the Federal Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State.

The instrument used for the purpose of gathering data for this study is a self-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was titled: Sex-for-Grade Questionnaire (SFGQ). The questionnaire consisted of two sections, that is, sections A and B. Section A contained the bio data of respondents while section B contained questions on sex-for-grade practice as shown in the research questions. Respondents were expected to rate each of the items in section B on a Likert four point's scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The internal consistency reliability test technique was adopted for the study. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency as it calculates all possible split half values of the test. A coefficient of .870 was obtained. The data collected for the study was analysed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test. A measure of central tendency, that is the mean, was used to describe the average of each category data. Finally, the hypotheses for the study were tested using test statistics.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Research Question 1**

What are the effects of the sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the effects of the sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1.	Victims of sex-for-grade have endless trauma.	3.7472	3.25448	SA
2.	Students have feelings of low self-esteem when lecturers demand sex to award them good grades.	3.2236	2.84995	SA
3.	Victims of sexual harassment become frustrated in academics.	3.1611	2.72233	A
4.	Being a victim of sexual harassment creates hatred for the opposite sex.	2.975	2.62784	SA
5.	Victims of sexual harassment engage in addictions such as masturbation, smoking, drinking, etc.	3.3361	2.95287	SA
6.	Victims of sexual harassment feel humiliated, especially when a third party is aware.	3.2652	2.83969	SA
7.	Victims of sexual harassment are usually depressed.	2.9791	2.62308	SA
8.	Victims of sexual harassment develop a withdrawal syndrome.	3.1152	2.70133	A
9.	Sexually harassed students sometimes attempt suicide.	3.1097	2.75176	SA
10.	The self-confidence of sexually harassed students diminishes.	3.1347	2.70133	A
11.	Society may lose faith in the quality of certificates as a result of sexual bartering on campus.	3.4875	3.03498	SA
12.	Victims of sexual harassment may feel unsafe to participate fully in the academic activities of the tertiary institution.	3.2097	2.76485	A
13.	Graduates who obtained their certificates through sexual bartering create problem for the labour market.	3.5097	3.07498	SA
14.	Students who are sexually harassed lose trust in school officials.	3.1555	2.71313	A
15.	Sexually harassed students may likely drop out of school.	3.8055	3.30781	SA
16.	Sexual harassment negatively affects students' performance in academics.	3.7263	3.23908	SA
17.	Images of lecturers are tarnished when accused of sexually assaulting students.	3.175	2.74114	A
18.	Academic careers of seasoned academics have been terminated through cases of sexual harassment.	3.1625	2.72233	SA
19.	Students who are sexually harassed find it difficult to make new friends.	3.2652	2.90593	SA
20.	When falsely accused of sexual harassment, family members of academics may lose the respect of others.	3.2125	2.78488	SA
21.	When falsely accused of sexual harassment, academic lose passion for their job.	3.0722	2.71671	SA
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>		<b>3.2775</b>	<b>2.85859</b>	<b>SA</b>

**KEY: A- Agree, SA – Strongly Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree**

Source: Researcher's calculation, with the aid of SPSS

From table 1 above, questions 15 and 1 recorded the highest mean of 3.81 and 3.75 respectively. The least mean distribution was recorded by question 4 which is 2.98 and the grand mean is 3.2775, which indicates that the respondents strongly agree to the effects of sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

#### 4.2 Research Question 2

What are the strategies for the effective control of sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the effective control of sex-for-grade practice in tertiary institutions

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1.	Sexually harassed students can cope by relying on support from friends and family.	3.2583	2.80475	A
2.	To control sex-for-grade practice in tertiary institutions, students should be allowed to see their scripts after examinations.	3.0750	2.63153	A
3.	Victims of sexual harassment should always avoid perpetrators.	3.0944	2.76284	SA
4.	Victims of sexual harassment should report to authorities of their institutions.	2.9722	2.61990	A
5.	Investigative journalism is an effective strategy to control sex-for-grade practice in tertiary institution.	3.5652	3.08445	SA
6.	Lecturers who sexually assault students should be dismissed.	3.3763	2.89059	A
7.	Students who sexually harass lecturers should be rusticated.	3.1416	2.78687	SA
8.	Victims of sexual harassment should expose perpetrators on social media.	3.5597	3.06684	SA
9.	To prevent sexual harassment, school authorities should discourage indecent dressing among students.	2.8541	2.50444	A
10.	Victims of sexual harassment should visit counselors and psychologists for professional counsel.	3.4527	3.03726	SA
11.	Sex education should be provided, especially for newly admitted students.	2.9902	2.62361	SA
12.	Perpetrators of sexual harassment should face legal actions, regardless of status or influence.	3.5055	3.05550	SA
13.	Students being harassed should always record conversations between them and the perpetrators as proof.	3.3347	2.89347	SA
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>		<b>3.2446</b>	<b>2.82785</b>	<b>SA</b>

**KEY: A- Agree, SA – Strongly Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree**

Source: Researcher's calculation, with the aid of SPSS

From table 2 above, questions 5 and 8 recorded the highest mean of 3.57 and 3.56 respectively. The least mean distribution was recorded by question 9 which is 2.85 and the grand mean is 3.2446, which indicates that the respondents strongly agree to the effects of sex-for-grade practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### 5. Discussion

For students who are genuinely harassed by lecturers, Table 1 shows that they often develop withdrawal syndrome. This is supported by Taiwo et al, (2014) that the memory of the act often remains with the victim, and it continues to trigger a feeling of depression that can make the victim develop a withdrawal syndrome, particularly from men with long-term impact on decision to be married. Supporting this also, Ogunbameru, (2006) stated that victims of sexual harassment may drop out of school, change residence, avoid advisers, or neglect academic commitments or responsibilities to avoid a harasser.

In Table 2, respondents agree that sexually harassed students can cope by relying on support from friends and family. This coping strategy in cases of sexual harassment is supported by Gutek and Koss (1993) who discovered that reliance on social support from colleagues, friends, and family members is an effective way to help sexually harassed students. This was also re-echoed in the study of Stockdale, (2006) in which it was documented that sexually harassed women often coped by relying on their male support network—fathers, brothers, husbands, relatives or friends of higher status to intervene in the situation and step in as protectors.

Respondents, in Table 2, also agree that victims of sexual harassment should report to the authorities of their institutions. Ellsberg, Winkvist and Pena (2001) reported that women are typically very reluctant to discuss sexual harassment or abuse with others. Bergman et al. (2002) reported that women are usually being blamed if

they make a complaint about their harassment, and this is one of the major reasons why many of them choose to remain silent, to avoid public embarrassment and criticism.

The findings of this study show that sexual harassment is not a new phenomenon in tertiary institutions. Although it encompasses both males and females, the burden of sexual based violence is borne more by females, with such effects culminating often to physical and mental illnesses, low self-esteem, suicidal behaviors, to mention but a few. There is no doubt that this is a major systemic barrier to women education and development in the nation.

### Conclusion

The unethical practice of exchanging sex for grades projects a negative image of the teaching profession both nationally and globally. And if left unchecked, society will lose faith in the quality of certificates that are awarded by tertiary institutions.

The following conclusions are based on the results of the research:

1. Endless trauma, low self-esteem, and depression are some of the effects of sexual harassment on its victims.
2. Some of the strategies for the effective control of sexual harassment in Nigerian tertiary institutions include having strong policies on sexual harassment, suspending staff and students found guilty, providing professional counsel for victims of sexual harassment.

### Recommendations

Sequel to the findings and discussions from this study, the following recommendations are made to effectively control this practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions:

- Tertiary institutions should employ the use of investigative journalism as a strategy to control sex-for-grade practice on campus.
- Students, especially females, should be discouraged from visiting lecturers alone in their offices during odd hours of the day.
- Students who are victims of sexual harassment should visit counselors and psychologists for professional counsel.
- Faculty members who perpetrate sexual harassment should be suspended and guilty students should be expelled.

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