



## Perception of students of sociology discipline on forms and determinants of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

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### Abstract

*This study examined the perception of students of sociology discipline on forms and determinants of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Three study objectives guided the study in which three hypotheses were also tested with chi-square test statistics. The population of study constituted of about 480 regular undergraduate students out of which the research team drew a representative sample of 120 across the four levels as study participants. A close ended questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection. The statistical package for the social sciences was used to process data while descriptive statistics was adopted in the analysis of study objectives. The findings of the study showed that indecent dressing is the major determinant of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, while rape is a major form of its manifestation. It was recommended among other things that the university's sexual harassment policies, and the committee set up to control the menace of sexual harassment on campus should be strengthened for better results.*



**Keywords:** *perception, determinants, sexual harassment, university, sociology discipline*

## **Introduction**

Human rights are basic rights guiding individual human behavior and how they coexist in the society. According to UNICEF (1948), human rights are standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationship with the State and the obligations that the State have towards them. These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. They are indivisible. Whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural in nature, they are all inherent to the dignity of every human person.

The problem of sexual harassment in societies, which often infringes human rights, has long history although its prevalence is often difficult to quantify. This is because it is widely underreported. As an organizational problem, sexual harassment could be defined as an unwanted imposition of sexual gratification in the context of a relationship of unequal power (Gupta, 2014). The scope of sexual harassment is not merely limited to physical coercion and aggression alone, it also encapsulates verbal assault. Hence, McCann (2018) defined sexual harassment as the perpetuation of “sexual” conduct and ‘sex based’ behavior which can be deemed as unwelcome to the recipient. In other words, it may be described as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which an individual considers offensive. Such dispositions constitute sexual harassment when:

- (1) Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly as a term or condition for an individual to attain a goal,
- (2) Submission to or rejection of such goal decisions affecting such individual, or
- (3) Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with individual’s performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

An ideal school environment must first of all be conducive for learning both physically, emotionally and mentally. Learning is a mental exercise hence the quality of learning and



instruction can be hampered by factors other than the competency of the lecturer or the willingness of the student to learn. An ideal school environment should emphasize equality as every student should enjoy equal access to resources and other materials helpful to learning. Therefore an atmosphere of intimidation or harassment immediately disrupts the virtue of equality and creates an imbalance that sets the victim at a disadvantage compared to his/her colleague. A citadel of learning especially the university naturally serves as a training ground for Potential and prospective leaders of the society hence should model behaviors that are both pro- Social and altruistic. Self-development is a major goal of learning and self-development itself comprises of cognitive, mental and emotional development but this is only possible in an atmosphere devoid of intimidation.

Nigerian tertiary institutions instead of functioning as citadels of higher learning have become a center for sexual exploitation and harassment, Nwadiani (2018: 20) in the 12th convocation ceremony lecture of the Delta State University, Abraka Nigeria, stated that sexual harassment of female students by lecturers have become a common practice in some universities in Nigeria. Sexual harassment creates an atmosphere of fear which can set off a range of emotions such as social anxiety or what is popularly known as inferiority complex in the student. It could also lead to stress, drug abuse and depression which may tail off into suicidal ideation. Sexual harassment possesses a strong ability to breakdown the mental strength of the victim and could even result to disinterest in learning. Since, sexual harassment inhibits the emotional and mental development of the victim, creativity, interest in learning and innovativeness at school or elsewhere could become severely limited.

The Nnamdi Azikiwe University management through the Vice Chancellor constituted sexual harassment committee to attend to sexual harassment cases. The committee consists of erudite professors, mostly female, who would hear cases and even recommend sanction for lecturers who harass students for sex. Female students have a unique expression of sexual abuse and thus are more affected compared to male students hence the prevalence of women on the panel. The committee is not meant for the students alone as it would also investigate cases where students cajole or pester lecturers with sex in exchange for marks. The existence of the above committee is a testimony to the fact that

the university authority is very committed to stemming out sexual harassment in the institution.

In spite of the well-meaning efforts of the school management, sexual harassment has not been completely eradicated from the school environment. This suggests the willingness of few lecturers to gamble with their integrity, job and even freedom; or the desperation of the student to risk his/her studentship and dignity for sex. Either ways, the continued occasional occurrence of sex for marks suggests the need for a more concise approach at tackling the menace. The status of Nnamdi Azikiwe University as one of the top ranked universities in Nigeria could be severely damaged if sexual harassment of students is left unattended to in the university.

It against the background of highlighted problems that this study examined the perception of students of sociology discipline at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka on forms and determinants of sexual harassment at the institution., The study investigated and provided new strategies to manage and or curb the incidence of sexual harassment on Nnamdi Azikiwe University campus. The findings of this research can also serve as a template for other universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and educational organizations to solve the age long problem of sexual harassment.

### **Study Objectives**

The major objective of this work is geared towards understanding the perception of undergraduates of sociology discipline on forms and determinants of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The specific objectives are as stated below:

1. To identify the forms of sexual harassment that students of sociology discipline perceive to thrive at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.
2. To find out the perception of students of sociology discipline about causes/determinants of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.
3. To recommend measures to be put in place to control sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

### **Study Hypotheses**

The understated hypotheses were formulated and tested in the course of the study:

1. There is a significant difference between the views of male and female students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka on causes of sexual harassment in the institution.
2. There is no significant difference between the views of female students across different levels of study on forms of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
3. Male and female students in lower levels of their study are more likely to be sexually harassed than their counterparts at higher levels of study at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

### **Brief Review of Literature**

Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual behaviour that is offensive, humiliating or intimidating. It can be written, verbal or physical and can happen in person or online. According to the University of Zambia Sexual Harassment Policy (UZSHP, 2010) sexual harassment is an unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with a person's work or educational performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or learning environment.

A major element in sexual harassment is the perception that it challenges the victim's psychological well-being (Ekore, 2012). Hence, it is apt to say that sexual harassment as a social and psychological problem constitutes violence against the victim. The perception of university students to sexual harassment among themselves can be said to be subjective and controversial topic of study. From time immemorial, the issue of sexual harassment of students in institutions of higher learning (like polytechnics and universities) has really being a worrisome issue affecting the social fabric of institutions of higher learning. Early sexual harassment studies in higher institutions focused on sexual harassment between students and faculty staffs. Dziech and Weiner (1984), noted that sexual harassment has existed in the higher education community as long as there have been women students and male professors".



A review of twenty university studies done by Rubin and Borgers (1990), confirmed that sexual harassment occurred for 30% of female students, regardless of the definition of sexual harassment and method used. According to Tavares and Wodon, (2018), nine out of ten of the world's countries have laws against sexual harassment in working life today, but almost six out of ten lack adequate laws against sexual harassment in higher education and schools.

One in every three women in the world is exposed to physical and/or sexual violence from a partner or sexual violence from another person (UN Women 2019). Studies based on a large and wide selection of respondents, which include detailed questions on experiences of sexual harassment and/or marginalized groups with limited influence over their situation, result in a higher reported incidence of sexual harassment (McDonald 2012; Till 1980). The prevalence of sexual assault on students (primarily women) at universities in USA is also well documented. Data suggest that 22 per cent of college women have experienced dating violence and nearly 20 per cent have experienced completed or attempted sexual assault since entering college (Voth Schrag, 2017; Fedina et al., 2018).

In a study by Zelman and Goodchild (1984), cited by Ekore (2012), it was found that behavioural implication of gender differences exists in perception of sexual interest. Many then find it difficult to understand why women see sexual advances on the job upsetting. On the other hand, men often see behaviour that women characterized as harassment, as just good fun or even complimentary. It can be inferred from the above finding that a difference might exist in perception of sexual harassment between male and female students in the university. In the US for instance, lower court cases offered the "reasonable woman" standard that has been used in determining if indeed an incident could legally be classified as sexual harassment. The reasonable woman standard takes into account the gender of the victim because research has established the existence of large gender differences in perceptions of hostile environment sexual harassment situations (Baird et al., 1995).

Diets-Uhler and Murrell (1992), found that males felt more strongly than females that "people should not be so quick to take offense when a person expresses sexual interest in

them.” In their study, men were also more likely than women to believe that sexual harassment is overblown in today’s society and that it takes place in business settings more often than in school settings. Although research tends to focus on harassment where the perpetrator is male and the victim is female, some studies have reported that males are frequent victims of sexual harassment.

A few data exists on the perception of sexual harassment among students in most African universities, but the view that have been carried out in the University of Zambia, (Menon et al., 2014) shows that females’ perception of sexual harassment in the university exceeds that of the males. In a study conducted by Ekore (2012), in a sub Saharan Africa University showed that female respondents with a mean score of 39.6 perceived sexual harassment more than their male counterpart with a mean of 38.1.

#### Theoretical thrust

This study is anchored on functionalist theoretical approach. The functionalist theory opines that everything in the society has a function to perform, without which that ‘thing’ ceases to exist Nnonyelu (2009). The functionalist perspective is one of the prominent theories in the field of sociology which is also known as requisite functionalism and was propounded by Talcott Parsons, one of the most influential American sociologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the leading exponent of modern functionalism (Rao, 2008).

This theory draws it inspiration from the work of Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim who likened society to a living organism in which each parts contributes to the survival of the whole. The modern day functionalism emphasizes on the way in which different parts of the society are structured to maintain the stability of the whole society. It also seeks to explain how society tends to be organized, stable, and well integrated when its members agree on basic values and carry out their different roles for the society to be at the state of equilibrium. For the functionalist, institutions, in this regard education, persist due to the important role it performs to it members and the entire society (Ibid). Education is functional to both the individual and the society at large, it is the key to a sustainable development of any society as such anything that pose a threat to education becomes harmful to the society as well.



Sexual harassment is seen as a threat to education because it has the capacity to influence academic performance which in turn truncate the academic pursuit of the student thereby making education dysfunctional to the society. It is for this'd reason that the findings of the study as well as the recommendations are geared to help eradicate sexual harassment in Nnamdi Azikiwe university thereby making the intended functions of education to fully manifest.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study adopted cross sectional survey design. The respondents in the study, purposely chosen by the research team are regular undergraduate students of sociology discipline at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria. Their total population at the time of study stood at about 480, out of which a representative sample of 120 was carefully drawn in such a manner that the sample constituted of students across the four levels of study. The accidental sampling /convenience of availability approach was adopted. The students were met in classrooms and those who were willingly disposed to participate were drawn into the sample. However, only 30 students were drawn per level.

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire with closed ended items that addressed the objectives of the study. The self-administration technique was adopted because the respondents are literate. The research team recorded 100% recovery rate of the instrument after administration. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to process field while inferential statistics like contingency tables, frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, bar charts among others were employed in analysis of study objectives. The research hypotheses were tested with chi - square test statistics.

### **Research Findings/Discussion**

#### **Personal Data of the Respondents**

This section dealt with personal data of the respondents such as sex of respondents, ages of respondents and religious affiliation as shown in Table 1 below:





**Table 1: Number of Respondents, Ages of Respondents and Religious Affiliation**

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Sex of Respondents</b>		
Male	52	43.3
Female	68	56.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Ages of Respondents (Years)</b>		
	1	0.8
	94	78.3
	21	17.5
	3	2.5
	1	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>
Average Age	20.57	
Std. Error of Mean	0.332	
Std. Deviation	3.639	
<b>Religion Affiliation</b>		
Christianity	104	86.7
Atheism	1	0.8
Islamic	5	4.2
African Traditional Religion	10	8.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2021

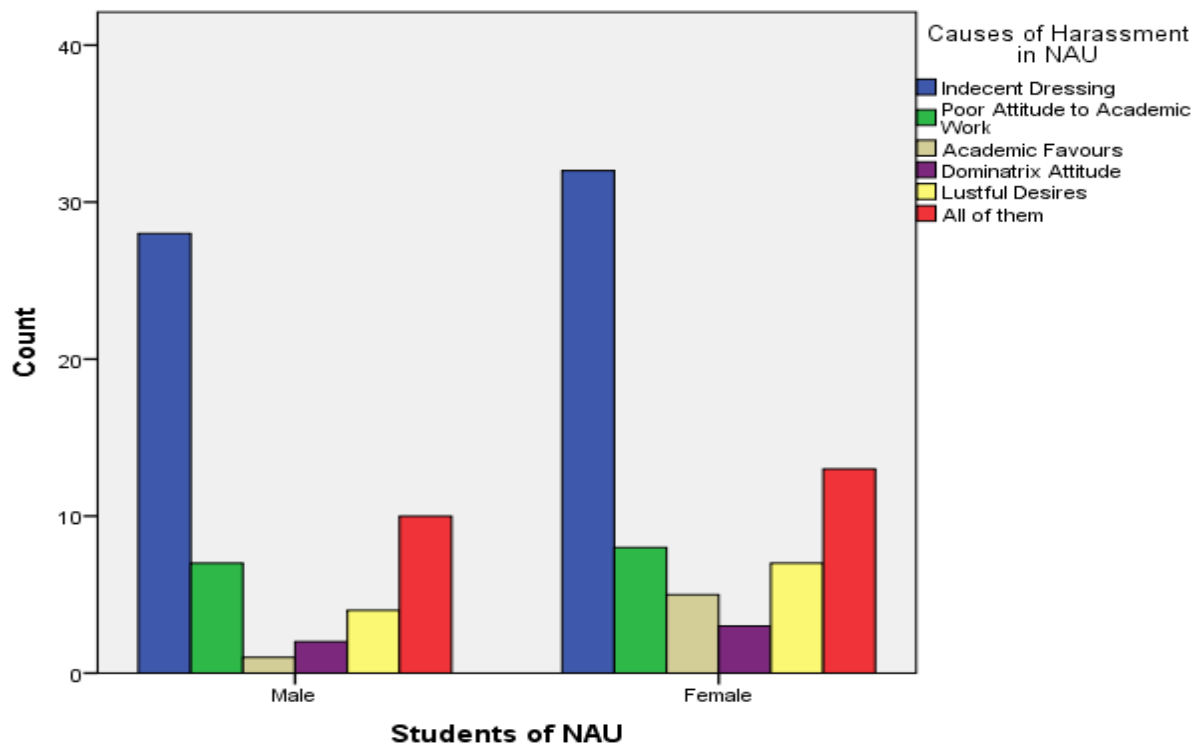
Table 1 shows that 56.7% of the respondents which is the majority are females. Also, the majority of these respondents are within the age bracket of 20-30 years which is 78.3%, while the least number of respondents is shown in the age bracket and 50 years and above with both 0.8%. The mean age of respondents is 20.57, approximately 21 years; the standard deviation age of the respondents is 3.639 years approximately 4 years.

**Table 2: Views of Male and Female Students on Causes of Sexual Harassment at NAU Awka**

Students	Causes of Sexual Harassment at NAU Awka						Total
	Indecent Dressing	Poor Attitude to Academic Work	Academic Favours	Dominatrix Attitude	Lustful Desires	All of Them	
Male	28	7	1	2	4	10	52
Female	32	8	5	3	7	13	68
Total	60	15	6	5	11	23	120

Table 2 shows the views of respondents on the causes of sexual harassment at NAU Awka, of which indecent dressing with the highest response rate of 60 or (50%) was recorded by both male and female respondents. The least responses (5) was recorded by both male

and female respondents on Dominatrix Attitude. The views of the students (male and female) on causes of sexual harassment at NAU Awka are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Bar Chart for the Views on Causes of Harassment by Male and Female Students in NAU Awka.

**Table 3: The Views and Expected Number of Views of Male and Female Students on Causes of Sexual Harassment at NAU Awka**

			Students of NAU * Causes of Harassment in NAU Cross-tabulation						Total
			Causes of Harassment in NAU						
			Indecent Dressing	Poor Attitude to Academic Work	Academic Favours	Dominatrix Attitude	Lustful Desires	All of them	
Students of NAU	Male	Count	28	7	1	2	4	10	52
		Expected Count	26.0	6.5	2.6	2.2	4.8	10.0	52.0
	Female	Count	32	8	5	3	7	13	68
		Expected Count	34.0	8.5	3.4	2.8	6.2	13.0	68.0
Total		Count	60	15	6	5	11	23	120
		Expected Count	60.0	15.0	6.0	5.0	11.0	23.0	120.0

Table 3 shows the actual number of responses and the expected number of responses by the male and female students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Awka on the causes of sexual harassment.

**Table 4: Chi-Square Test Result on Views of Male and Female Students on Causes of Sexual Harassment at NAU Awka**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.317 <sup>a</sup>	5	.804
Likelihood Ratio	2.527	5	.772
Linear-by-Linear Association	.302	1	.583
N of Valid Cases	120		

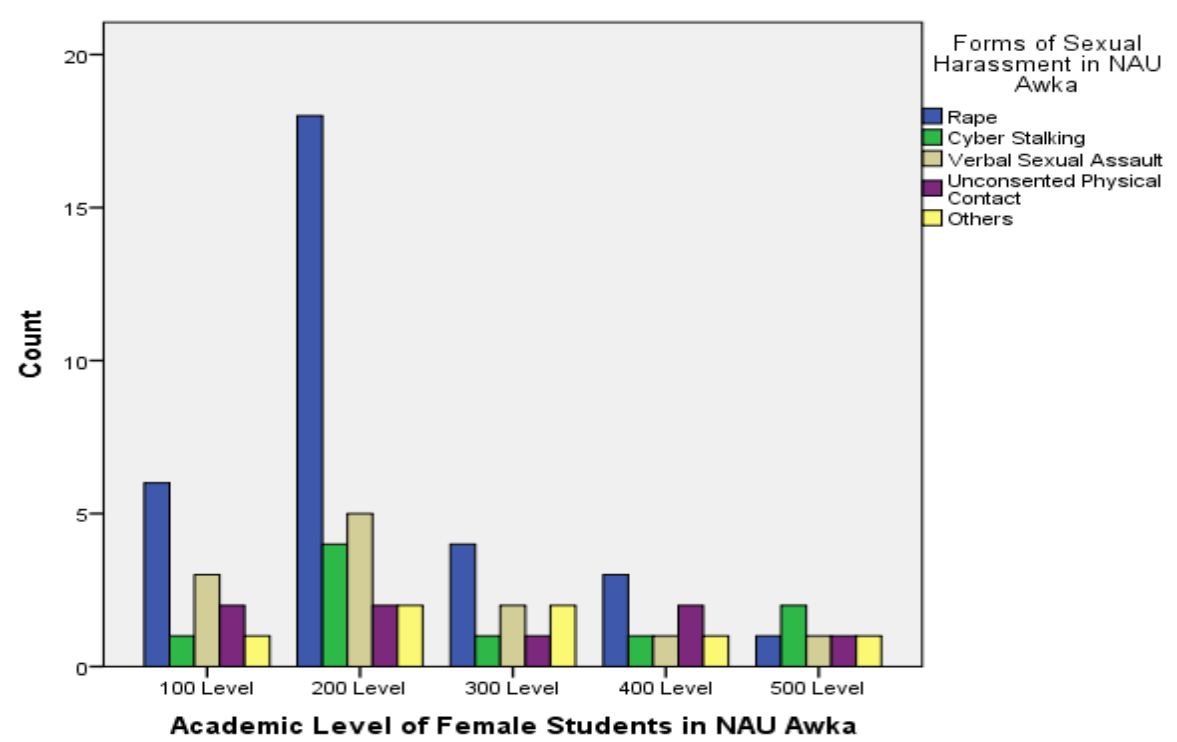
a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.17.

Table 4 gives a Chi-square result of 2.317 with a p-value of 0.804, which is less than 0.05 (the level of significance), implying that there is no significant difference between the views of male and female students in NAU Awka on causes of sexual harassment in the institution.

**Table 5: Views of Female Students Across Levels of Study on Forms of Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka**

		Forms of Sexual Harassment					Total
		Rape	Cyber Stalking	Verbal Sexual Assault	Unconsented Physical Contact	Others	
Academic Level of Female Students in NAU Awka	100 Level	6	1	3	2	1	13
	200 Level	18	4	5	2	2	31
	300 Level	4	1	2	1	2	10
	400 Level	3	1	1	2	1	8
	500 Level	1	2	1	1	1	6

In Table 5, the highest response was recorded by female students in 200 Level, which is 31 views, of which 18 views from these 200 Level female students are recorded on Rape. The least response was recorded by female students in 500 Level. However, the highest views of the female students in NAU Awka all pointed at Rape. The views of female students across levels of study on forms of sexual harassment in NAU Awka are presented in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2:** Bar Chart for the Views of Female Students Across Levels of Study on Forms of Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka

**Table 6:** The Views and Expected Number of Views of Female Students Across Levels of Study on Forms of Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka

Academic Level of Female Students in NAU Awka * Forms of Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka Cross-tabulation			Forms of Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka					Total
			Rape	Cyber Stalking	Verbal Sexual Assault	Unconsented Physical Contact	Others	
Academic Level of Female Students in NAU Awka	100	Count	6	1	3	2	1	13
	Level	Expected Count	6.1	1.7	2.3	1.5	1.3	13.0
	200	Count	18	4	5	2	2	31
	Level	Expected Count	14.6	4.1	5.5	3.6	3.2	31.0
	300	Count	4	1	2	1	2	10
	Level	Expected Count	4.7	1.3	1.8	1.2	1.0	10.0
	400	Count	3	1	1	2	1	8
	Level	Expected Count	3.8	1.1	1.4	.9	.8	8.0
	500	Count	1	2	1	1	1	6
	Level	Expected Count	2.8	.8	1.1	.7	.6	6.0
	Total	Count	32	9	12	8	7	68
		Expected Count	32.0	9.0	12.0	8.0	7.0	68.0

Table 6 shows the actual number of responses and the expected number of responses by the female students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Awka across levels of study, on the forms of sexual harassment

**Table 7: Chi-Square Test Result on Views of Female Students Across Levels of Study on the Forms of Sexual Harassment at NAU Awka**

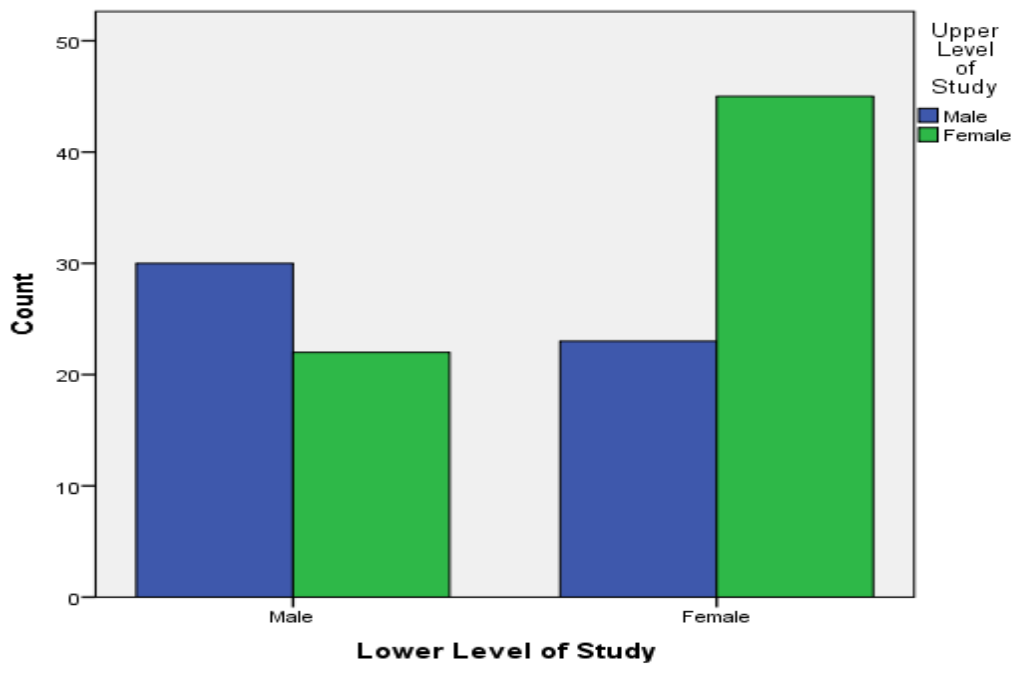
	Chi-Square Tests		
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.818 <sup>a</sup>	16	.921
Likelihood Ratio	8.346	16	.938
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.942	1	.163
N of Valid Cases	68		

a. 22 cells (88.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .62.

Table 7 gives a Chi-square result of 8.818 with a p-value of 0.5921, which is greater than 0.05 (the level of significance), implying that the null hypothesis is not rejected and hence there is no significant difference between the views of female students across levels of study on forms of sexual harassment in NAU Awka.

**Table 8: Views of Male and Female Students of Lower Level of Study and those of Higher Levels of Study on Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka**

Lower Level of Study	Higher Level of Study		Total
	Male	Female	
Male	30	22	52
Female	23	45	68
Total	53	67	120



**Figure 3: Bar Chart for the Views of Male and Female Students of Lower Level of Study and those of Higher Levels of Study on Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka**

**Table 9: The Views and Expected Number of Views of Male and Female Students of Lower Level of Study and those of Higher Levels of Study on Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka**

			Upper Level of Study		Total
			Male	Female	
Lower Level of Study	Male	Count	30	22	52
		Expected Count	23.0	29.0	52.0
	Female	Count	23	45	68
		Expected Count	30.0	38.0	68.0
Total	Count	53	67	120	
	Expected Count	53.0	67.0	120.0	

Table 9 shows the actual number of responses and the expected number of responses by the Male and Female Students of Lower Level of Study and those of Higher Levels of Study on Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka

**Table 10: Chi-Square Test Result on Views of Male and Female Students of Lower Level of Study and those of Higher Levels of Study on Sexual Harassment in NAU Awka**

	Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.808 <sup>a</sup>	1	.009		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	5.874	1	.015		
Likelihood Ratio	6.846	1	.009		
Fisher's Exact Test				.010	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.751	1	.009		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.97.  
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 10 gives a Chi-square result of 6.808 with a p-value of 0.009, which is less than 0.05 (the level of significance), implying that the null hypothesis is rejected and hence Male and female students in lower levels of their study are more likely to be sexually harassed than their counterparts at higher levels of their study in NAU Awka.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study show that indecent dressing is the major determinant of sexual harassment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, while rape is also a major form of its



manifestation. These findings will add to the literature on issues of sexual harassment and defines the nature of interventions required at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, such as strict dress code for students.

The findings also reveal that there is no significant difference between male and female students on causes of sexual harassment at the institution which they all identified as indecent dressing. Similarly, there was no significant difference among females across different levels of study as they all agreed that rape is the major form of sexual violence and harassment. Finally, another hypotheses tested in the course of the study confirmed that boys and girls in lower levels of their study are more likely to be harassed than those at higher levels of study. This makes a case for additional safety valves or protection against new entrants into the university, since they are more prone to sexual harassment.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka should set up or strengthen her committee on dress code to curb indecent dressing among students which the study identified as the major cause of sexual harassment in the institution.
2. The school's sexual harassment policy and her existing committee on sexual harassment should be revamped. The expansion of membership of the committee is crucial. The committee should also organize sensitization activities to purge the university community of tendencies toward sexual harassment.
3. There is need to protect new students whom the research finding revealed are more prone to sexual harassment than their older counterparts. Such protection will be in forms of adequate security on campus, orientation about reporting channels to take to advantage of, if harassed.
4. There is need for intensified awareness creation using every available platform to castigate sexual harassment in all ramifications on campus. Such platforms include lecture sessions, students union events, staff meetings and management - students interactions.



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