

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AT A CROSSROADS: EXAMINING THE 'SEX-FOR-GRADES' PHENOMENON AT A SELECTED INSTITUTION IN MASVINGO PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The phenomenon known as "sex-for-grades" presents a significant challenge within tertiary institutions, including universities, polytechnics, teacher training colleges, nursing schools and agricultural colleges. This study investigates the prevalence of the sex-for-grades phenomenon experienced by female students at a university located in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. Employing an exploratory qualitative design, the research purposively selected a sample of 25 female students and collected data through semi-structured questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was disseminated via digital platforms, including university email communications and learning management systems, as well as through in-person visits conducted between May and August 2025. Open-ended responses and qualitative feedback obtained from participants were analyzed thematically, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and contextual insights. The findings indicate a pervasive culture of verbal, visual and online harassment, which is further exacerbated by cultural stigma and a fear of reprisal. The consequences of these incidents include significant psycho-emotional trauma, diminished academic performance, weakened social connections and increased vulnerability among the affected students. This study advocates

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for universities to adopt comprehensive sexual harassment policies, establish clear reporting mechanisms, ensure the provision of safe and dignified learning environments, impose stringent sanctions on perpetrators to restore confidence in institutional responses and provide specialised training on sexual harassment for academic staff.

Keywords: *sexual harassment, lecturer, state university, Zimbabwe.*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of sex-for-grades is a serious and ongoing problem in tertiary institutions, with clear evidence emerging daily. Faustino *et al.* (2025) conclude that this issue has persisted throughout history, receiving little attention for various reasons. Moyo (2023) and Lukaszek (2022) indicate that, in some institutions, the campus environment has become hostile and unsafe, compromising its function as a space for learning and the cultivation of respectful, lasting relationships. Multiple international studies identify sex-for-grades as a widespread form of gender-based discrimination affecting students—predominantly women—during everyday campus life. For example, a national Swedish survey found that one in five female respondents had experienced unsolicited sexual conduct (Ostergren *et al.*, 2025). Similar findings have been reported in Indonesia (Rahmawaty *et al.* 2025), Zimbabwe (Chifamba and Zvobgo, 2024), Spain (Serradell and Puigvert, 2025), Portugal (Faustino *et al.*, 2025) and South Africa (Quirk and Dugard, 2024). While sexual misconduct can affect individuals of any gender, evidence suggests that women are disproportionately affected in many contexts (Palmieri *et al.*, 2025). Accounts include instances in which male staff exploit financial or positional power to seduce,

coerce, or threaten female students sexually, as well as reports of male students subjecting female peers to sexual threats.

Estimates of campus sex-for-grades incidents are unreliable due to widespread under-reporting. Victims often remain silent or avoid the perpetrator out of fear or shame (Casey and Hampson, 2024). Sexual harassment of female students by lecturers is a documented campus issue and fear of blame and perceived lower status relative to staff and administrators conceal it. Evidence shows unequal academic outcomes: undergraduate women who resist advances may suffer academically, while those who acquiesce are likelier to complete their programmes (Gukurume, 2021). In preceding studies by Bondestam and Lindquist (2020), Matope and Muchabaiwa (2023) and Silvia *et al.* (2025), fear of failing modules, threats of retaliation, perceived inaction by grievance handlers and embarrassment are identified as reasons for non-reporting. Logan (2023) and Pfuurai (2023) add that some female students view such harassment as inconsequential, a perception shaped by cultural norms and gender stereotypes that excuse men's violent sexual behaviour while blaming women for it. Most of these students live in countries and families where rape within marriage is still not considered a crime.

A parliamentary study on sexual harassment in Zimbabwe documented multiple incidents in which university lecturers exploited their positions to coerce students into sexual relations (Moyo, 2023). Furthermore, Mundopa (2020) notes that at Midlands State University, two lecturers were apprehended for engaging in sex-for-grades with female students and were subsequently suspended by university management. A polytechnic lecturer in Gweru was reportedly dismissed after

sexually harassing a female student, having had sexual relations with her, yet awarding her a failing grade. Great Zimbabwe University terminated a lecturer at its Mashava campus for a range of offences, including assault and sex-for-grades indignities (Moyo, 2023). At Bindura University of Science and Technology, two lecturers were implicated in separate incidents of assault against a female undergraduate. The University of Zimbabwe reported a scandal involving a lecturer and five female students. At Lupane State University, the Pro-Vice Chancellor faced allegations of inappropriate relationships with female students and other staff members. In light of these occurrences, the present study aims to empirically investigate female students' experiences of sex-for-grades harassment at a selected institution in Masvingo Province.

LITERATURE REVIEW

'EX-FOR-GRADES: A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Although there have been improvements in attitudes and policies since the start of the #MeToo Movement, evidence indicates that sex-for-grades and assault continue to be widespread issues among universities worldwide, significantly affecting both social dynamics and the health of victims. This is not new: gendered vulnerabilities (physical, emotional, or professional) have long been a concern and feminist activists and allies have campaigned for gender justice in higher education for decades. In Europe, a systematic review found that nearly 60% of countries lack adequate laws against sexual harassment in higher education. Harassment ranges from sex-for-grades, sexist language to sexual assault (Bilal *et al.*, 2022). In Egypt and elsewhere, much gender-based harm within universities goes unaddressed by the criminal

justice system and is left, if at all, to institutional procedures. In the U.S., Woods *et al.* (2018) note that deliberations of voluptuous harassment are informed by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which forbids sex discrimination at federally funded schools and is enforced by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). OCR distinguishes *quid pro quo* (Latin phrase that translates to "this for that", "something for something") – requesting sexual considerations in exchange for paybacks – from hostile-environment pestering, where severe or persistent conduct disrupts the educational setting. Despite these frameworks, Bilal *et al.* (2022) estimated that by 2024, about 29% of U.S. students – over 12 million – had experienced sexual harassment, with rates much higher for women (36%) than men (5%).

Practices related to sex-for-grades vary based on a person's gender. Estimates of the prevalence of sex-for-grades at universities differ by gender and student status. Blindow *et al.* (2024) report that 61.9% of undergraduates experienced sexual harassment from lecturers since their enrolment. However, their study differs from the current one, which also considers gender-based sexist behaviours. In Woods *et al.*'s (2018) sample, 50% of undergraduate women reported having been harassed at least once, with 22.2% experiencing repeated harassment after being promised higher grades. Rahmawaty *et al.* (2025) found that 41% of female graduate students faced sex-for-marks harassment perpetrated by faculty or staff members, while 12% experienced harassment from their classmates. The most common forms of harassment in universities include spoken comments, jokes and non-verbal gestures. When academic grades are involved, gender-based violence (GBV) can escalate to sexual penetration.

Harassment has wide-ranging consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, depression, poorer mental health, internalised shame, isolation, helplessness, alcohol misuse, disgust and insomnia (Lindsey *et al.*, 2023). Victimised students also report lower academic satisfaction, diminished views of faculty, reduced engagement and poorer performance (Mawere and Seroto, 2022). Coping strategies differ by gender, culture, race and tradition. Serradell and Puigvert (2025) found that 52% of harassed women avoided the harasser (versus 25% of men), 24% avoided certain buildings (versus 10%) and 11% dropped or skipped classes (versus 3%). Defensive actions—such as avoiding classes, changing mentors or majors, missing class, or withdrawing—can further disrupt students’ education.

Studies of sexual harassment in Zimbabwean universities reveal a widespread problem that institutions inadequately address. Moyo (2023) found most universities lacked formal procedures, with only four of 13 having sexual harassment policies, though many were developing measures. Gukurume (2021) and Matope and Muchabaiwa (2023) document frequent victimisation of female students by male lecturers and note widespread under-reporting due to scepticism about disciplinary action. Gukurume (2021) also reported some tolerance of the practice and instances of transactional sex as students coped with tuition and living costs. Across studies, respondents identified male lecturers as the main perpetrators and cited pursuit of marks—manifesting as sex-for-grades—as a central driver of harassment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative approach to emphasize how individuals interpret and assign meaning to their experiences. As

Elo *et al.* (2014) note, qualitative research seeks to understand how people make sense of events, construct social realities and attribute significance to their experiences. This approach suited an investigation of how undergraduate women interpret and navigate situations where male lecturers commit sexual harassment. Mason (2018) argues that qualitative methods effectively capture complex, nuanced personal experiences aligned with the researcher's focus. A case study design enabled in-depth examination of participants' emotions, contextual factors, perspectives and interpersonal dynamics. The study relied mainly on first-hand accounts from undergraduate women about their experiences and perceptions of sexual harassment, supplemented by institutional reports on incident handling. Overall, the qualitative design was appropriate because it foregrounded subjective experiences that surveys or questionnaires might miss.

Data were obtained from 25 purposively sampled female students, aged 18-35, enrolled in the second and fourth years within the Faculties of Social Sciences and Law. Email invitations were distributed to all female students at these levels, requesting participation from individuals who had experienced sexual harassment by male lecturers on campus. A purposive sampling strategy was employed due to the sensitivity of the topic and anticipated recruitment challenges.

A comprehensive, open-ended questionnaire was designed to collect qualitative data. The instrument explored topics including personal or observed experiences of harassment, awareness of institutional policies, perceptions of reporting procedures and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms and the link was distributed to

consenting participants via WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or email, according to their stated preference. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire at their convenience and researchers remained available to provide clarification and support as required. The principal investigator's telephone number was provided on the form for participants who preferred direct contact.

A thematic approach was used to analyze the data. Following Elo *et al.* (2014), this involved reading interview transcripts, identifying issues with similar meanings and using participants' quotations to support the emergent themes. A narrative lens complemented the thematic analysis, enabling deeper insight into the complexities of the experiences reported by harassed undergraduate women and was corroborated by accounts from university officials. By emphasizing concrete examples and first-hand accounts, the approach facilitated a robust and credible representation of the phenomenon. Credibility was further strengthened by collecting data directly from undergraduate women who had experienced sexual harassment and by verifying their accounts through interviews with university officials who had received reports of such behaviour, while maintaining the confidentiality of individual disclosures.

Ethical safeguards were put in place to minimise potential harm to both participants and researchers. The study emphasized research integrity and honesty, focusing particularly on informed consent, confidentiality and privacy. Before each interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose and how the findings would be shared and utilised and written consent was obtained. Immediately following each interview, participants were invited

to listen to the audio recording to ensure that their responses had been accurately captured. This process, known as member checking or participant validation, enhances the trustworthiness of qualitative findings by allowing participants to confirm the accuracy and relevance of the data in relation to their experiences.

RESULTS

The study examines sexual harassment experiences of female undergraduate students at a state university in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. Predominant forms of harassment reported by participants included *quid pro quo* demands, offensive sexual comments, unwanted touching or groping (including stroking), unwelcome sexual attention and intrusive questioning. These behaviours were identified as the study's primary sub-themes.

THEME 1: QUID PRO QUO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This form of harassment occurs when an individual in a supervisory role explicitly or implicitly solicits sexual favours from an employee in exchange for favourable treatment or to avoid adverse consequences. , the term denotes unequal power relations in which male lecturers request sexual favours from female students, who possess comparatively less power. The excerpts from the study document instances of *quid pro quo* sexual harassment involving male lecturers and undergraduate female students. One of the participants stated:

“We should schedule an after-hours dinner at my residence to celebrate a successful semester.” (Participant, 12)

While another opined:

“Without prior warning, my supervisor communicated via text message, stating, ‘If you assist me, I will reciprocate’.” (Participant 9)

Another female student recounted a vivid experience where she was confronted with a sex-for-grades situation in her lecturer's office. She narrated:

“During my first year, I enrolled in a demanding quantum mechanics module. Despite dedicating my weekends to studying, I did not pass the coursework. Professor Chits [a pseudonym] invited me to his office to discuss my situation and offer guidance. Upon my arrival, he began with a compliment before outlining how he could assist me. I clearly communicated that I was seeking effective strategies to improve my coursework. The professor then inquired whether my romantic relationship was affecting my academic performance. I firmly stated that I did not have a boyfriend and, despite devoting significant time to studying, I continued to encounter difficulties. He then stood up, crossed the room and sat beside me. He suggested that he could change my final grade if I agreed to go on a few dates with him.” (Participant 11)

Sex-for-grades encompassed various forms of unwanted sexual behaviour that were offensive or harmful to the victim. This behaviour manifested as a singular comment or as a series of comments that persist over time. The phenomenon included a range of activities, some of which are criminal, such as rape, sexual assault and battery. It encompassed physically abusive actions, including threats and fondling, as well as verbal harassment, which included derogatory statements, spreading rumours, or soliciting sexual favours in exchange for better grades. Non-verbal behaviours contributing to this issue included unwelcome touching, hugging, kissing, caressing and obstructing an individual's path in a sexually suggestive manner. Furthermore, non-touching actions, such as telling inappropriate jokes, leering, or repeatedly requesting dates, also play a role in this phenomenon. Visual harassment may occur through the

dissemination of inappropriate images, pornography, or attempts at seduction through suggestive attire.

Male lecturers engaged in inappropriate behaviour by proposing romantic relationships to female students and threatening academic failure should these advances be rejected. This conduct represented a significant abuse of power by the lecturers involved. Distinguishing between an actual academic failure and one that is perceived becomes increasingly challenging when a female student chooses to decline the lecturer's sexual propositions. Being compelled to repeat a course due to coercive actions from an educator, whose role is to provide support and guidance, severely hindered the professional development of female students. Additionally, this form of sanction imposed by a perpetrator of sexual harassment was tantamount to financial victimisation, as the repercussions of repeating a module resulted in undue financial burdens for the affected students.

“Male lecturers sometimes ask female students out. I recall instances where male lecturers boast about how female students must engage in sexual relations with them to pass their courses.” (Participant 15)

One female student highlighted that the absence of concrete evidence and the perceived inaction of those handling complaints serve as significant obstacles for individuals seeking justice. One participant emphasized the significant challenges that victims often face when recounting their experiences of sexual harassment.

“Sexual harassment is a serious issue at the university, mainly involving male lecturers targeting female students. After a lecture, I was victimised. When I reported it to the department chair, he told

me to write a report. However, I chose not to and offered to retract my complaint due to fear of retaliation.” (Participant 13)

The fear of reporting sexual harassment is evident in the participants’ statement. An academic environment cannot thrive when it is filled with fear. Although students sometimes come forward to report sexual harassment by male lecturers, many later wish to retract their allegations. Such incidents often occur in the lecturers’ offices, typically after official working hours. This situation puts victims at risk, as they may feel that not reporting the harassment could prevent them from facing negative consequences, such as delaying their graduation. As a result, they might feel compelled to comply with the perpetrator's demands to meet in their offices outside of official hours. Additionally, one-on-one research supervision in a lecturer's office can create a conducive environment for sexual harassment to occur.

THEME 2: OFFENSIVE SEXUAL COMMENTS

Offensive sexual comments by male lecturers are another form of sexual harassment experienced by female undergraduate students. Such remarks, often framed as jokes or offhand observations, create an atmosphere of discomfort and intimidation that undermines students' sense of safety and belonging on campus. Female students reported that comments about their bodies, clothing, or perceived sexual availability were sometimes made in lecture halls, during office hours, or in private communications. Even when couched in humour, these remarks conveyed power imbalances and reduced academic interactions to sexualised encounters, shifting focus away from learning and toward self-policing of appearance and behaviour. Excerpts below are evidence of this form of harassment taking place in the university.

"You look more beautiful in that braided dress; it highlights your femininity." (Participant 13)

"I consulted my research project supervisor for feedback on a chapter I had submitted. He said he had no time to review it and suggested that, if I wanted the chapter marked, I should go to the lecturer's house, enter his bedroom, remove my clothes and have sexual intercourse with him, after which he would mark the chapter." (Participant 14)

Another participant stated

"A lecturer once informed me that he considered me very attractive and, as a result, awarded my assignment a notably high mark." (Participant 25)

The impact extends beyond individual incidents. Participants revealed that frequent exposure to sexualised language from lecturers normalises disrespect, leading to decreased class participation, avoidance of certain lecturers and reluctance to seek mentorship or academic support. Participants described feelings of ignominy, apprehension and isolation; some dropped classes to avoid certain lecturers. Some female students received offers of extra academic help by male lecturers. Others received offers of food, accommodation, transport and money in exchange for sexual relations.

THEME 3: TOUCHING OR GROPING

Sexual harassment experienced by female students includes touching or groping, often perpetrated by male lecturers, as illustrated by the excerpt below.

"I went to my research supervisor's office to check on the outcome of my proposal. He informed me that it had been approved. He congratulated me and gave me a hug. When I tried to pull away from the hug, he held on and told me I was very beautiful. He then kissed me on the mouth." (Participant, 18)

The excerpt illustrates how a male lecturer perceives a female student as an object in a transactional sexual relationship. The lecturer exploits his power to demand something inappropriate, fully aware that the female student may not feel confident enough to report the incident to authorities. Even after he kissed her on the mouth without her consent, she chose not to report the occurrence.

THEME 4: STROKING

Stroking is a form of sexual harassment perpetrated by lectures on female students as evidenced by the excerpts below.

“During a consultation regarding an assignment in my lecturer's office, he sat in close proximity to me. He stroked my hair and expressed his desire to take me out for lunch in town.” (Participant 13)

“I felt uncomfortable with my research project supervisor due to the manner in which he stared at my chest and touched my waist, as this behaviour compromised the integrity of our supervisor/supervisee relationship.” (Participant 7)

The dynamic of one-on-one research supervision and assignment consultation between a male lecturer and a female student foster an environment that is susceptible to sexual harassment. This is highlighted by the examples provided in the excerpts above, which illustrate the precarious nature of such interactions. The power imbalance inherent in this relationship, combined with the personal nature of academic guidance, may lead to situations where inappropriate behaviour can occur, making it essential to recognise and address these potential risks.

THEME 5: UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION

Participants experienced unwanted sexual attention, a pervasive issue that significantly impacted their campus life. This challenge affected their daily routines, academic decisions and overall mental well-being. Incidents of unsolicited advances, inappropriate comments, digital harassment and physical intimidation contributed to an environment in which numerous young women felt unsafe. The cumulative impact of these experiences resulted in a reduction of personal autonomy, leading students to avoid particular courses due to concerns regarding specific instructors, limited their late-night study sessions in the library and refrained from engaging in fieldwork or extracurricular activities due to apprehensions about encountering potential predators.

“A male lecturer acquired my cell phone number and subsequently began sending me sexually suggestive messages via WhatsApp, even during late hours such as midnight. Upon confronting him with the possibility of reporting his behaviour to higher authorities, he ceased these communications.” (Participant 18)

Another participant narrated her experience that resulted in her failing a module:

“A male lecturer initiated a proposal for a romantic relationship. I declined his advances, which subsequently resulted in my failure of the two modules he instructed. I am presently in the process of retaking these two modules.” (Participant, 23)

Sexually suggestive communications and assertions that students must engage in sexual activities with male lecturers in order to pass a module constitute compelling evidence of the pervasive issue of sexual harassment perpetrated by male faculty members. These lecturers often make romantic proposals to female students;

accompanied by threats of academic failure should their advances be rejected.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study investigates the enduring issue of sex-for-grades, with an emphasis on understanding the lived experiences of undergraduate students who have encountered sexual harassment. The phenomenon of sex-for-grades has infiltrated various dimensions of university education at the selected institution. These findings are consistent with research conducted in other countries, including South Africa (Adams *et al.*, 2013). Further studies in Spain (Lombardo and Bustelo, 2022) and Portugal (Faustino *et al.*, 2025) also reveal the prevalence of sex-for-grades and sexual exploitation within university environments. The dominance of male lecturers has contributed to several social challenges, with sex-for-grades emerging as a particularly pressing concern. This circumstance underscores the implications for the education and empowerment of female members of society, particularly the younger generation, who may be susceptible to the ambitions of predatory individuals. As noted by Ostergren *et al.* (2025), universities possess the potential to deliver comprehensive sex education through a thoughtfully structured framework. Integrating sex education into the academic context equips students with essential knowledge regarding sexual abuse and fosters a nuanced understanding of human sexuality, thereby enhancing the resilience of female students against unsolicited sexual advances.

The experiences reported by undergraduate female students align with the Feminist Socio-cultural Theory, which posits that the socio-political context of sex-for-grades dereliction is shaped by

prevailing norms, values and institutional structures (Farzad, 2021). Male lecturers exercise forms of power that may include the ability to award or withhold passing grades. Within this framework, sex-for-marks functions as a mechanism through which female students are subordinated to that power. Such conduct serves to reinforce and preserve male superiority within social systems, including academic institutions. Extending this analysis, it becomes evident that harassment is not merely a series of isolated interpersonal transgressions, but a patterned expression of gendered domination embedded in everyday practices. The transactional dynamics between lecturers and students—marked by assessment authority, mentorship selection and gatekeeping of academic opportunities—create systematic vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect female students. When sexualised demands or advances are entangled with evaluative control, the boundaries between professional appraisal and personal exploitation blur, normalising coercive interactions and undermining the integrity of educational processes.

Moreover, institutional silence and inadequate policy enforcement contribute to the perpetuation of these power asymmetries. Formal grievance procedures that are opaque, slow or biased, deter reporting and tacitly communicate tolerance for misconduct. Chifamba and Zvobgo (2024) posit that administrative cultures that prioritise reputation management over survivor support further entrench a milieu in which perpetrators can act with impunity. In such environments, female students frequently encounter conflicting incentives: the need to complete degrees, secure references or maintain favourable academic standing versus the moral and psychological imperative to resist or disclose harassment. Silvia *et al.* (2025) suggest that this dilemma

underscores how institutional structures mediate the costs of resistance and shape the contours of submission.

Cultural scripts surrounding femininity and academic authority also play a crucial role. Stereotypes that depict women as passive, accommodating or unassertive, intersect with expectations of male dominance, making female students' reports less likely to be believed or taken seriously. Similarly, the valorisation of charismatic or authoritative male professors can create conditions in which inappropriate behaviour is minimised or rationalised as eccentricity or mentorship style. According to Palmieri *et al.* (2025) these discursive frameworks not only invalidate survivors' experiences, but also naturalise hierarchies that facilitate continued exploitation. Intersectional dimensions further complicate the picture: race, class, religion and sexual orientation mediate how harassment is experienced and addressed. Marginalised students may face compounded barriers to redress, including distrust of institutional mechanisms, fear of stereotyping or limited social capital to mobilise support. Thus, interventions that fail to account for intersecting identities risk reinforcing selective protections that benefit more privileged groups, while leaving others exposed.

Addressing sexual harassment within academia, therefore, demands multi-level responses that disrupt both the micro-interactions and macro-structures that sustain gendered power. Preventive measures should include clear, accessible reporting channels; impartial investigative bodies; and sanctions that signal zero tolerance. Equally important are cultural reforms: mandatory training that emphasizes consent and power dynamics, curricula that interrogate gendered norms and leadership committed to

transparency and survivor-centred practices. Empowering students through collective mechanisms – such as student unions, peer-support networks and confidential advocacy services – can rebalance asymmetrical relationships and offer alternative loci of authority. Ultimately, transforming the socio-political context requires re-imagining institutional values so that equity and accountability are integral to academic life. Only by confronting the structural roots of sex-for-grade practice – examining how pedagogical hierarchies, assessment regimes and organisational cultures reproduce gendered subordination – can universities move beyond damage control toward substantive change. In doing so, they affirm that educational spaces must be sites of both intellectual growth and fundamental respect for dignity, where power is exercised with responsibility, rather than weaponised for domination.

This study demonstrates that incidents of sexual harassment are prevalent among female university students at the institution. The research attributes this issue to certain male lecturers who display inadequate self-discipline and self-control, leading them to solicit sexual favours from female students in exchange for favourable academic evaluations. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Mawere and Seroto (2022), which indicates that a significant number of female students are subjected to sexual harassment – both verbal and physical – during the first semester of the academic year. Moreover, the study reveals that sexual harassment occurs primarily between female students and male lecturers within the selected university. Some female students, who encounter difficulties in their studies and in achieving satisfactory examination results independently, may resort to attempting to gain favour from male lecturers. Furthermore, the

research expresses the view that the attire of some female students, which may be deemed provocative, could attract the unwarranted attention of male lecturers. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Quirk and Dugard (2024), who identify a notable trend of sexual harassment perpetrated by male lecturers against female students.

The study illuminates the multifaceted nature of sex-for-grades on campus and its profound repercussions on female students' wellbeing and academic trajectories. Addressing this challenge requires a combination of robust prevention strategies, responsive institutional mechanisms, expanded psychosocial support and sustained community engagement. Only through coordinated and sustained efforts can campuses become safer spaces where all students can pursue their education free from fear and harm.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study investigates specific experiences of sexual harassment, including the identities of alleged perpetrators, the possibility of multiple perpetrators, victim characteristics, the impacts on victims and the institutional mechanisms available for reporting and redress. Future research should seek to address these limitations. The excerpts presented in this study reflect only the personal lived experiences of the interviewed individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined in the study serve as a foundational framework for universities that are dedicated to addressing the issue of sexual harassment. The university should cultivate an environment that prioritises academic pursuits over any form of sexual objectification. This involves the establishment

of a rigorous zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and the empowerment of female students to report incidents without fear of retaliation. This perspective is consistent with the assertions of Andrews and Yang (2021), who contend that when all stakeholders within the university actively engage in combating sexual harassment, the likelihood of preventing such occurrences will significantly increase.

It is also imperative for undergraduate female students to develop support networks that facilitate empowerment and assist survivors of sexual harassment in their healing journeys. This aligns with the findings of Aycock *et al.* (2019), who indicate that effectively addressing GBV, including sexual harassment, requires a comprehensive transformation in social norms that transcends individual actions. It is crucial to instil a shared sense of responsibility that encourages active intervention in all instances of sexual harassment, rather than limiting involvement to cases involving acquaintances. Furthermore, the establishment of an anonymous hotline would provide a valuable resource for students to report their experiences with sexual harassment confidentially.

It is imperative that the policy be revised to incorporate more stringent penalties for offenders. Moreover, enhancing familiarity and awareness of the sexual harassment policy among both faculty members and students could significantly diminish the occurrence of such incidents, thereby promoting a healthier and safer environment for the entire university community. It is crucial to establish rigorous protocols to address instances of sexual harassment involving male perpetrators, as this will foster trust and confidence among female undergraduate students in the

university's support services. Any male lecturer found to have sexually harassed a female student, with evidence substantiated beyond a reasonable doubt, should face termination of employment. This approach would act as a powerful deterrent to potential male offenders.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that female undergraduate students at the university encounter various forms of sexual harassment, predominantly perpetrated by male lecturers. Victims of such harassment frequently experience fear, accompanied by feelings of embarrassment and intimidation, which can adversely affect their academic success and access to resources. This fear may prompt some female students to withdraw from their degree programmes or refrain from utilising available facilities and opportunities. Consequently, female students may be placed at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts, who do not endure similar experiences. Sexual harassment within university environments is unequivocally unacceptable. Subjecting female students to this form of misconduct during such a vital phase of their education has profound and widespread consequences for their academic and personal development. Moreover, this type of harassment constitutes a severe violation of the fundamental human rights and dignity of female students. This study contributes to the discourse on sexual harassment, an important aspect of the broader framework of GBV. The findings aim to illuminate this persistent issue of male chauvinism and advocate for appropriate responses within universities and other environments that are affected by sexual harassment.

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