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Types, Prevalence and Predictors of Sexual Harassment on Female Students of Higher Institutions of Ethiopia: The Case of Debre Markos University, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is one of the biggest challenges of female students in higher institutions of Ethiopia. The objective of this study was to investigate the types, prevalence and predictors of sexual harassment on female students of Debre Markos University. A mixed design approach was employed and data were collected from female students (n=463) using stratified random sampling techniques and from administrative workers of the University (n=5). Quantitative data were collected using a modified version of Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire (SHEQ) (Fitzgerald et al, 1988) having 35 items with three dimensions of harassment (Gender harassment, Unwanted sexual attention, and Sexual Coercion. Qualitative data were gathered through FGD and in-depth interviews. Mean, frequency percentage and Pearson's correlation were applied to analyze quantitative data. Thematic analysis was applied for qualitative data. The result showed that more than 36% of the participants had experienced at least one form of sexual harassment either on campus or off campus. A strong positive correlation was found between sexual harassment experience and unwanted sexual attention ($r=.69$, $P<0.001$); sexual harassment experience and sexual coercion ($r=.54$, $P<0.001$) and unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion ($r=.691$). Female students who are non-café were mainly the victims of sexual harassment and the perpetrators were male students, instructors, taxi drivers and businessmen in the town. The findings suggest that female students face different forms of sexual harassment and the university has to make intervention to stop the problem. The finding has the implication that similar studies need to be conducted in other higher education institutions of Ethiopia.

Keywords: Debre Markos University, prevalence, types, sexual harassment

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Both men and women are engaged in the work force equally. This equality is however violated in the sense that women are sexually harassed by men (Omar, 2008). Research studies revealed that sexual harassment occurs in every place where men and women are working together. For example, it occurs in the workplaces and educational institutions. Sexual harassment of female students in the university setting has a long history and has existed as long as there have been female students and male instructors (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984 cited in Beaugard, 1996). Improvements in the equity and access of education to females have enabled them to join universities. For example, recent data shows that the proportion of females in higher education institutions of Ethiopia in the undergraduate level has reached 38% (MoE, 2015). Though this is a positive progress, high rate of females joining higher education institutions could increase the level of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is a global problem and it is not restricted to a certain place, culture or society. For example, studies conducted at UK indicated that 95 per cent of female students experienced sexual harassment (Wilson, 1995). Though there are situations in which both sexes are sexually harassed, previous researchers found that girls were more frequently harassed than boys (Young et al., 2008 cited in Sang, Kemboi & Omenge, 2016).

Sexual harassment in educational settings is a common problem (Okeke, 2011) and it is a normal practice in Sub-Saharan African countries including Ethiopia. It is also tolerated and, little action is taken in schools to address the problem (Leach, 2003; Mirembe & Davies, 2001 cited in Mat, 2013). As a result, many women and girls are harassed every year. For example, the World Health Organization (2005) report indicates that 59% of women in Ethiopia have experienced sexual violence in their life time.

Women who have been harassed experience psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, stress, decreased self-esteem, self-doubt, diminished self-confidence, decreased concentration, feelings of humiliation, helplessness, vulnerability and alienation besides the physical harm (Taiwo, Omole, and Omole, 2014).

Different factors are attributed to cause sexual harassment. For example, a local study in Jimma university showed that peer-pressure, threatened downgrading of marks by instructors, apprehension of dismissal as a result of the refusal of sexual intercourse are just some of the factors that lead to harassment (Lemessa, 2003).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Sexual harassment is one of the most common forms of violation of a person's body and dignity, but least investigated by researchers (Omar, 2008). These days, sexual harassment is increasingly viewed as a major problem affecting the physical and emotional wellbeing of victims. Besides, it is one form of violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls to equality and dignity.

Sexual harassment is a reality in Ethiopian higher education institutions and it has adverse effect on the victims' physical and psychological well-being and academic achievement. A study conducted in Jimma University (Wudu & Getahun, 2009) revealed that the rate of dismissal of female students is increasing and one of the causes for their dismissal is was found to be sexual harassment.

The prevalence and types of sexual harassment in Ethiopian universities appears to be under-researched and even less reported except in few universities like Jimma University by Almaz, Kinde and Yasmin (2015).

Similarly, there is no data on the prevalence and type of sexual harassment among female students of Debre Markos University. Therefore, the investigators were convinced that doing research would figure out the problem clearly.

1.3. Objective

The major objective of this study was to assess sexual harassment in Debre Markos University. Specifically, it aimed to:

- Investigate the types of sexual harassment predominantly found among Debre Markos University female students.
- Identify the prevalence of different types of harassment among DMU female students
- Explore triggering factors that lead to sexual harassment.
- Investigate the challenges against fighting sexual harassment.
- Assess the environmental factors that initiate sexual harassment of female students.

1.4. Significance

The findings of this study are important in identifying the extent to which sexual harassment is being practiced on female students of Debre Markos University so that appropriate legal action could be taken on the perpetrators. Besides, the investigators believe that the findings would help the university in general and Women and HIV/AIDS prevention directorate of DMU in particular to suggest intervention mechanisms. The findings of this study would also help identify groups of victims and provide them counseling. Moreover, the study could serve as a benchmark for other researchers to conduct a similar study in other institutions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Approach

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed in this study. In the quantitative aspect, descriptive survey was employed and data were gathered using questionnaire from sampled female students across all colleges and years. Likewise, qualitative data were sought through in depth interviews and focus group discussion with key informants.

2.2. Population and Participants

The population of this study was all regular female students of Debre Markos University. This population was selected purposefully since female students as a group are the victims of sexual harassment while males as a group are considered to be perpetrators. Moreover, key informants like experts from Gender, HIV/AIDS and disability Directorate, Students' Union, Students' affairs directorate, and College deans were participants of the study.

2.3. Sample Size

Four hundred fifty female students attending their education in the main and Bure campuses were randomly selected to participate in this study. Similarly, 13 key informants who engaged in FGDs and in-depth interviews were selected by using non probability sampling techniques like purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

2.4. Data Collection Methods

To investigate the types of sexual harassment, 35 items related to Sexual Harassment Experience (SHEQ) (Fitzgerald et al, 1988) with three types of harassment were used. These are (1) Gender harassment (5 items). This group includes items such as 'has someone told you sex related jokes? Has someone insulted you using sex related terms? Etc. (2) The second type of sexual harassment is related to Unwanted Sexual Attention and this was measured using 9 items. These include sex provoking issues such as: has someone commented on you regarding your physical appearance? has someone asked you to have sexual relationship with you? Has someone touched you without your need? etc. and the third one is related to Sexual Coercion and it was assessed using 5 items. In this group, items such as 'has someone used a gift to approach you as a sex or love mate? Has someone bullied you because you refused his question for sexual relationship? Has

someone who has an authority harmed you in anyway because you refused to accept his need for sexual intercourse? etc. Questionnaire items were translated to Amharic after they had been prepared in English to avoid language barrier that participants may face.

We gathered qualitative data using in-depth interview and FGDs. In-depth interview was done with college deans, Gender and HIV/AIDS directorate officers, Students' Affairs Directorate officers and Students' Union president office. Two FGDs were conducted with female students in the main and Bure campuses. We conducted FGDs with female students around their dormitories. Three postgraduate female students from the institute of Educational and Behavioral Sciences in Debre Markos University were recruited as assistant data collectors and conducted FGDs with female students in the main and Bure campuses. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews with college deans and gender and HIV AIDS directorate were done by the investigators. The investigators conducted the in-depth interviews in the office of each key informant. On average, the in-depth interviews lasted from 35-40 minutes. Audio recordings were employed to gather after consent was obtained from key informants.

In the in-depth interview, we raised topics related to reports/cases of sexual harassment on female students; whether there was physical and psychological problems and academic failure experienced by sexually harassed female students; the different forms/types of sexual harassment that female students have reported; and who the harassers/perpetrators are in most cases.

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected through questionnaire were first coded and entered to SPSS version 20. Then the items of the questionnaire were grouped into themes and sub-themes and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques like frequency, mean, and percentage. Besides inferential statistics particularly Pearson's correlation, and one-way ANOVA, were used to analyze quantitative data. Regression analysis was used to check the predictive power of independent variables on sexual harassment. Likewise, qualitative data collected through FGDs and in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded after thoroughly reading. The codes were then categorized into themes and subthemes.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Sexual harassment is a sensitive issue and there should not be any sort of psychological harm on participants. Being aware of this, the investigators followed APA ethical guideline while conducting this study. Accordingly, oral consent of participants was secured before data collection. All participants were clearly informed that their participation is based on willingness. In addition to this, the investigators confirmed to them that participants have the right to withdraw from the study if they find any sort of inconvenience. Besides, anonymity was used while reporting the findings of the study.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings from Quantitative Data

Findings from quantitative data are analyzed and summarized using tables. Both descriptive and inferential statistics have been employed to analyze quantitative data.

3.1.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-20	146	35.1
	21-22	188	45.2
	Above 22	76	18.3
Total		410	98.6
Campus	Debre Markos	381	91.6
	Bure	32	7.7
Total		413	99.3
year	1	18	4.3
	2	178	42.8
	3	155	37.3
	4	32	7.7
	5	30	7.2
Total		413	99.3
College	Social science	95	22.8
	IEBS	54	13
	Natural and Com	19	4.6
	Health scie	41	9.9
	Agriculture	99	23.8
Total		406	97.7

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Frequency of sexual harassment was measured using a five point Likert scale type of items. Cut off points were made on these scales in which 4-5 representing high level of sexual harassment, the mid-point 3 representing medium level of sexual harassment and 1-2 indicating no or low level of sexual harassment. Accordingly, participants who responded to have experienced sexual harassment most of the time and often are considered to be high; and those who scored 3 are considered to have faced medium level of sexual harassment. On the other hand, those participants who scored 1-2 are supposed to have little or no sexual harassment.

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Level of harassment
Most of the time(5)	27	6.42	High
Often (4)	42	10.08	
Sometimes(3)	86	20.58	Medium
Once or twice(2)	84	20.14	
Never(1)	177	42.5	Low
Total	416	100	

Table 2: Frequency and Level of Sexual Harassment Experience

Frequency of Sexual harassment experience (SHE) was measured using five items having Likert Scale type nature ranging from 5= Most of the time and 1= never at all. How often participants experienced sexual harassment was calculated using frequency and percentage. Hence, more than 69(17%) of them have faced high level of sexual harassment or they had been harassed repeatedly, while 86(20.58) have experienced medium level of sexual harassment. Yet, the majority (177(42.8)) of them reported that they have experienced low level of sexual harassment.

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Level of Harassment
Most of the time(5)	31	6.88	High
Often(4)	49	10.6	
Sometimes(3)	71	16.5	Medium
Once or twice(2)	82	19.8	
Never(1)	180	43.28	Low

Table 3: Frequency of Unwanted Sexual Attention

Participants were asked to indicate how often they have faced unwanted sexual attention from males both on campus and off campus. These include sexual jokes, comments about their physical appearance, dirty remarks and so on. Accordingly, 31(6.88%) of them faced unwanted sexual attention most of the time and 49(10.6%) of them experienced the problem often. Meanwhile, 82(19.8%) of the participants reported that they had unwanted sexual attention once or twice during their stay in the campus. The majority (180(43.28%)) of them reported that they had never faced the problem

3.1.2. Types and Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

One of the objectives of this study was to investigate the type of sexual harassment that predominantly exists among female students. The mean score of unwanted sexual attention was the highest ($M=19.67$) and 386 (92.8%) of the participants experienced unwanted sexual attention. Likewise, the mean score of gender harassment and social coercion was 10.87 and 8.59 respectively.

Variable		Gender harassment	Unwanted sexual Attention	Sexual Coercion
Gender harassment	Pearson Correlation	1	.690**	.542**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	409	381	401
Unwanted Sexual Attention	Pearson Correlation	.690**	1	.691**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	381	386	377
Sexual Coercion	Pearson Correlation	.542**	.691**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	401	377	406

Table 4: Relationship between Different Types of Sexual Harassment

Pearson correlation moment was conducted to check the type of relationship among the different types of sexual harassment scales. It was found that gender harassment has strong positive correlation with unwanted Sexual attention ($r=.69$, $P<0.01$). Likewise, Unwanted sexual attention has strong positive relationship with Sexual coercion ($r=.69$, $P<0.01$).

3.1.3. Predictors of Sexual Harassment

The researchers were interested to investigate if any of the demographic variables (campus, college and being fresh, junior or senior) predicts sexual harassment. To accomplish, multiple regression analysis was applied.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.092 ^a	.009	.000	15.26719	.009	1.042	3	363	.374

Table 5: Model summary for predictors of sexual harassment

a. Predictors: (Constant), campus, College, year

Multiple regression analysis model was conducted to check which independent variables, (that is, campus where students learn, college and year) significantly predict sexual harassment. model with all three predictors produced $R^2 = .009$, $F(3, 363) = 1.042$, $p = .374$. This suggests that variations in campus, college and year altogether predicted 9% of the variation in sexual harassment of female students.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	728.401	3	242.800	1.042	.374 ^b
	Residual	84610.574	363	233.087		
	Total	85338.975	366			

Table 6: ANOVA Test Result for Predictors of Sexual Harassment

a. Dependent Variable: Sexual Harassment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Campus, College, Year

The ANOVA test showed that none of the demographic variables significantly predicted sexual harassment $F(3,363) = 1.042$, $P = .374$. In other words, these variables are not good predictors of sexual harassment.

3.1.4. Experience of Sexual Harassment among Fresh, Junior and Senior Students

We tried to investigate if there is a difference in the amount of sexual harassment among female students who are fresh, second, third, fourth and fifth years. Multiple comparisons were done to see which groups had experienced more sexual harassment. To achieve this, Post hoc analysis was conducted and we found that first year female students had experienced more sexual harassment compared to second year ones ($M = 3.14$); year three students had experienced more sexual harassment compared to year 2 ($M = 4.41$); and Year 4 students have faced more sexual harassment compared to year 2 ($M = 4.91$).

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1675.967	4	418.992	1.820	.124
Within Groups	84251.844	366	230.196		
Total	85927.811	370			

Table 7: ANOVA Test for Sexual Harassment Experience among Fresh, Junior and Senior Female Students

We investigated whether being fresh, junior or senior student in a campus could be a factor in sexual harassment. Yet, the ANOVA test indicated that there is no significant mean difference of sexual harassment among fresh, junior and senior female students ($F(4,366) = 1.82$, $P = .124$).

3.2. Findings from Qualitative Data

This section deals about themes emerged from qualitative data. Quotations taken from key informants have been used to support these themes in the analysis.

3.2.1. Perpetrators and Victims of Sexual Harassment

Perpetrators of sexual harassment are diversified. Male students, male teachers, taxi drivers and others living in the campus surrounding were reported to be involved in sexual harassment. Most of the disciplinary problems related to sexual harassment are male teachers harassing female students (the case in College of Agriculture) and male students harassing female ones. On student-student sexual harassment, we attempted to explore which groups of students are more engaged in harassing female students and we were informed by a key informant from the Students' Union Office that senior male teachers are mainly engaged in harassing fresh female students.

Senior male students approach fresh female ones with the promise to help the later in course works; orienting them about exams and so on. However, this promise is a means to an end (having sexual relationship). (source: key informant from students' union)

Those female students who have little awareness about campus life and later outcomes of unwanted relationship suffer more as a result of sexual harassment. While conducting the FGD we probed who the victims of sexual harassment were and the reaction from participants was that girls who do not have boyfriends mainly face sexual harassment than coupled ones. Moreover, non-café ones have more incidence of harassment by men out of campus. Female students experience sexual harassment from different groups of males both on campus and off campus. We were informed by key informants that the harassers are male students, male teachers; taxi drivers and others living out of campus. For example, an in-depth interview with one of the vice deans in the main campus shows that male students harassed their female classmates.

There was a reported case of sexual harassment on female students. The harasser and the harassed were graduating classes from the department of psychology a year ago. The harasser was caught kissing a female student kissing a female student in a classroom.

He further added that student-student harassment is more common in the main campus. Likewise, there were reports of sexual harassment of female students across colleges like college of agriculture, Institute of Technology and College of health sciences.

Three female students were also harassed by males outside of campus such as business men in the town. This is mainly common for those female students who are 'non-cafes'. In relation to this point FGD participants mentioned that female students who are mainly 'non-cafes' go out of campus and hence it is very likely to experience harassment. There are rumors that the businessmen in the town cover food costs for female students and enjoy sexual relationship with them. Female students are also harassed by those male instructors offering courses and bribing female students with the promise offering high grades if they accept the request for sexual relationship.

Meanwhile an in-depth interview with the dean of social and humanities revealed that there is no formal report of sexual harassment. However, there are rumors of sexual harassment, particularly, male teachers harassing female students. He also mentioned that students are afraid to bring cases of sexual harassment to the college. This is a challenge to fight against sexual harassment.

In general, student-student sexual harassment is very common in Debre Markos university (In-depth interview with Gender, Disability and HIV/AIDS Directorate Director) compared to harassment made by teachers, and administrative staff.

3.2.2. Indecent Dressing by Females as a Reason for Sexual Harassment

Though males are the major perpetrators, it was reported that some female students instigate and invite males for harassment. For example, data gathered from Gender, Disability and HIV/AIDS Directorate offices as well as from Students' Union unanimously confirmed that indecent dressing style by females has recently become one factor for sexual harassment. Such incidents have become common especially since the last two years due to the loose rules and regulations as well as reluctance of the university to implement dressing code.

Among some of the behaviors that lead female students to be sexually harassed include dressing style such as wearing the miniskirts. Some female students also ask male students to have sexual relationship and finally accuse males that they harassed them (this happens when there is a disagreement or refusal of the request by the male partner).

Data gathered from students' affairs directorate also indicates that it is not only male students who are harassing females. The following quote taken from the key informant elaborates the issue more:

Issues are now being reversed... earlier there were more cases of males harassing female students forcefully... but now we are having cases in which females are the provokers for sexual harassment. They directly ask males for sexual relationship, their dressing style is provoking to sexual harassment.

Similarly, FGD with female students revealed that it is not only male students who are instigators of sexual harassment. Rather both parties equally provoke sexual harassment.

3.2.3. Forms of Sexual Harassment Experienced by Female Students

From the in-depth interviews with college deans and Gender, Disability and HIV/AIDS, directorate, we learned that female students face almost all forms of sexual harassment (direct sexual intercourse, commenting, mistreating, bullying etc.). The most common forms of harassment reported to the directorate office are commenting ('Lekefa') of female students by male students within the campus; unwanted sexual attention and request for sexual intercourse. A key informant from students' union mentioned that "seduction, embracing, and forcefully kissing" are common forms of harassment observed in the campus.

Likewise, during FGD session at Bure Campus participants mentioned that they experience verbal sexual harassment from males as indicated below.

"They comment you either positively or negatively "they speak out words like 'you are so beautiful'. Or they say 'you are ugly'. I do not like both comments. I get angry at that moment". (FGD participant at Bure campus).

Evidence from the institute of Educational and Behavioral sciences showed a case where 'a male student forcefully kissed a female student who is his own classmate'. A taxi driver was caught in a hotel room trying to have sexual intercourse with female students (source: Gender, Disability and HIV/ AIDS directorate). Likewise, FGD with female students at Bure campus suggested that female students are harassed outside of campus obviously with taxi drivers. The following quote from one FGD participant elaborates the issue more:

"I know a girl who was kidnapped by a Bajaj driver. She is not fluent in Amharic and could not explain her problem to the people around her during the incident... she suffered a lot".

Cases of sexual harassment are reported to different bodies. Accordingly, student-student sexual harassment is reported to students' affairs directorate while sexual harassment by instructors on students is reported to colleges/ schools/ and institutes.

3.2.4. Theme 5: Challenges against Fighting Sexual Harassment

In-depth interview with gender, disability and HIV/AIDS directorate director mentioned the big challenge against stopping sexual harassment in the campus is lack of assertiveness on the part of victim female students. That is, most female students who had been harassed fear to bring cases to the office. Instead, they prefer to conceal it until it is beyond their control. They report to the directorate office too late and after they had experienced several crises. Likewise, data from the Students' Union Office showed that most female students who have experienced harassment do not usually publicize it or bring cases to Gender, Disability and HIV/AIDS Directorate Office for fear of stigmatization. Some others also assume that it is a sign of backwardness to report incidents of sexual harassment.

According to a key informant from the Students' Union, the physical and social environment around Debre Markos University is just one factor for sexual harassment. There are several cafeterias located around the university. And Students gather in this cafeteria and chew khat, drink alcohol; smoke cigarettes and different forms of sexual harassment take place in these cafeteria.

In addition to these, some female students are engaged in commercial sex. According to a key informant from Students' Union, there are people in the town who earn business by being catalysts and brokers for female students and businessmen in the town. These brokers collect photographs of several female students whereby the harasser will choose a girl that he wishes to have sex with.

We probed the reason why female students are engaged in commercial sex and one of the reasons was that many of these girls need money to lead extraordinary and luxurious life (to buy clothes and jewelries that they wish).

3.2.5. Theme 6: Disciplinary Measures

Warning letter, dismissal, and suspending for one or more semesters are some of the disciplinary measures taken by the university on perpetrator students involved in sexual harassment. Data obtained from Students' Affairs Office showed that the disciplinary measure is on both actors (male and female) who are found engaged in a sort of sexual harassment in the campus.

3.2.6. Theme 7: Perceived Causes for Sexual Harassment

According to Students' Affairs Directorate, academic failure, substance use, alcohol, back history and hopelessness are some of the reasons that lead to unwanted sexual relationship. Female students who are engaged in unwanted sexual relationship are those who are academically weak. Such students are also engaged in anti-social behaviors such as theft. (He mentioned a case in which one female student was dismissed from the university due to theft recently) Thus, when they fail to succeed in their academics, they are motivated to be engaged in sexual relationship and even in theft.

3.2.7. Theme 8: Consequences of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment would result in several negative consequences on the victim. The consequence would be more severe for those female students who live far away from their family. The following case elaborates the psychosocial and academic problems that a girl faced as a result of unwise relationship with a male student.

The boy was a senior student, and the girl was a fresh one and our roommate. He approached her with the promise of helping her in academic matters. Gradually, she fell in love with him. She could not do anything. ...She does not attend class. She is simply dreaming of seeing his face day and night. Finally, he told her that he does no more love her. She cried a lot, she was depressed. He took away her mobile phone and could not give her back. The sad story is that she received academic dismissal and I don't know where she is now.

4. Discussion

This study found that female students experience different forms of sexual harassment including unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, and gender harassment. Findings from quantitative data revealed that more than 17% of participants have experienced high incidence of sexual harassment; 19% of them had medium level of sexual harassment; and the majority (43.28%) of them indicated that they had never experienced it. In other words, the majority of participants reported that they have low incidence of sexual harassment. Yet, the investigators think that even a single case of sexual harassment should not be ignored and hence need to be taken seriously. With regard to the prevalence, the investigators suspect that the number could be more than what has been reported. This is because from the in-depth interview with Gender, Disability and HIV/AIDS Directorate, we were informed that many female students do not report cases of sexual harassment.

Our finding on the prevalence of sexual harassment corroborates with the findings of local studies conducted in Ambo by Eshetu, (2015) on high school students and also a similar study conducted by Bekele, Zewde, and Neme (2017) on high school students of Limu Gener, Oromiya region though there is a variation on the type of population. Likewise, a study conducted in a similar population in Wolaita Soddo University showed that more than 36% of female students experienced sexual harassment while they were in campus (Adinew & Hagos, 2017) which is similar in prevalence with our study finding. In addition to this, survey study on Bahir Dar university female students found that more than 65% of female students experienced sexual harassment (Yeshimebrat, Alemayehu, & Firew, 2013). In the same way, a study

conducted in Jimma university female students found that the prevalence of sexual harassment is even greater than the current finding. The prevalence rates of physical, verbal and nonverbal sexual harassments were 78.2%, 90.4% and 80.0%, respectively (Mamaru, Getachew, & Mohammed, 2015).

Sexual harassment is also a serious issue in other countries. For example, one study in Nigerian universities found that nearly 70% of female students face sexual harassment (Joseph, 2015). In the same way, in the United States, more than 13% of undergraduate students had been victims of one form of sexual harassment (Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). Still another study on female employees by Idris, Adaja, Audu, and Aye, (2016) found that the prevalence of sexual harassment was 68%.

With regard to the types of sexual harassment, the current study found that female students faced different forms of sexual harassment. This includes forced kissing; raping, commenting on their appearance and dressing either positively or negatively; sexual jokes, mistreating, bullying and insulting.

We investigated if year of stay in campus, placement across different colleges/schools or institutes and campuses could be a factor for the variation of sexual harassment. The statistical analysis yielded that there is significant mean difference of sexual harassment among students found across different colleges. This suggests students in some colleges have experienced more sexual harassment than others. Qualitative data also revealed that sexual harassment is more common in some colleges among which college of agriculture and institute of technology. Further investigation is needed to know the reason why this has occurred.

At the inception phase of this study, we expected that some demographic variables such as campus placement, college where students are assigned and being a fresh, junior or senior student would predict sexual harassment. But none of these variables were found to be good predictors of sexual harassment. However, from qualitative data analyses we understood that being non-café; academic failure, substance use, alcohol use by males, past experience, peer pressure and hopelessness, and poverty are some of the reasons that lead to unwanted sexual relationship and harassment. Supporting our findings one research in Nigeria indicates that Poverty is related to be one cause of sexual harassment where the harassers take advantage of females in exchange of finance (Idris et al., 2016). The fact that some female students do not dine in the university cafeteria has exposed them to be harassed by people outside of campus.

Male students, instructors and men outside of the campus were reported to be perpetrators of sexual harassment. Of course, theoretical and empirical literature supports this claim. Our finding also showed that male students, instructors, taxi drivers, and businessmen in the town are the precursors for the majority of sexual harassment incidents. In line with the current finding, a comparative analysis by Joseph (2015) indicates that the perpetrators of sexual harassment are students, lecturers, and administrative staff. Likewise, one study in Nigeria showed that male instructors harass female students (Uduma, Samuel, & Agbaje, 2015).

The present finding is similar with a study conducted in Jimma university (Mamaru et al., 2015) in which Female students reported that the harassers were university teachers and the outside community. In the same way, Yeshimebrat et al., (2013) found that female students are harassed by senior students and those instructors girls are mostly victims of sexual harassments by senior male students and some instructors target grade as a means to achieve their need for sexual relation with female students.

Student-on-student harassment is the most prevalent form of harassment as we had been informed by key informants. Senior males mainly engage in harassing fresh females.

In contrast to this however, we understood that females are the instigators of sexual harassment. Females provoke males and make themselves ready for harassment.

We found several environmental factors that facilitate sexual harassment of female students. The fact that the university has been surrounded by commercial area has aggravated the harassment process. For example, taxi drivers park at the main gate of the university where female students are mainly seen moving in and out of campus. During in-depth interview with Students' Union and Students' Directorate Offices that brokers collect photographs from female students and then males in the town choose among these and make sexual relations. The brokers receive money from both parties for their services. Some key informants mentioned that the major reason that lead female students to engage in such an affair is poverty. The other one is their unlimited need of money to buy materials that they like.

In general, Debre Markos university has a code of conduct related to sexual harassment and every student is informed about this code of conduct. Gender, Disability and HIV/AIDS directorate is responsible for this particular issue. Accordingly, there are awareness creation education and training given to fresh female students every year. The university has taken a serious measure on harassers (particularly staff members and students). But, fighting the harassment that occurs outside of campus is a big challenge. We were informed that the university has been working with the town administration police to fight sexual harassment occurring outside of campus.

5. Conclusion

This study found that the prevalence of sexual harassment is high and girls experienced all forms of sexual harassment (unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, and gender harassment). The perpetrators of sexual harassment diversified: male students, Taxi drivers, instructors and businessmen in the town. This study has implication for similar studies to be conducted in other higher education institutions of Ethiopia. Besides, the findings suggest that DMU has to work in collaboration with different stakeholders to stop sexual harassment.

6. Recommendations

- Female students need protection and secure environment to succeed in their academics. Therefore, DMU need to take a strong disciplinary measure on those males (students, staff members) who are the perpetrators.
- Sexual harassment on female students occurs both inside and outside of campuses. Therefore, the university in collaboration with the police, town administrations and women, children and youth affairs office needs to work in collaboration and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- The university shall also provide awareness creation training on sexual harassment to the surrounding community. Besides it needs to have a clear policy on sexual harassment and implement it on perpetrators.
- The fact that there are many business centers surrounding the university (shops, cafeteria etc.) is a challenge against fighting sexual harassment. Hence, the town administrations should dislocate these business centers
- The prevalence of sexual harassment outside of the campus is high and the victims are non-café female students. Most female students are exposed to sexual harassment outside of the campus. Therefore, DMU need to find alternatives where non-café female students could access food in a safe and secure environment.
- Victims of sexual harassment face psychosocial and academic problems. Therefore, the university shall provide counselling services consistently and life skills training so that they can cope up with the challenge.

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