



EFFECTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON WOMEN STUDENTS' ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES AND FACILITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, KENYA

Juliet Njeri Muasya (PhD)

Lecturer, School of Education, University of Nairobi, P.O. Box 30197-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

Various governments, Kenya included are signatories to international and national declarations which recommend the implementation of gender equity policies in access and participation in education. However, women who study and work in the universities experience different forms of discrimination and oppression. The discriminatory practices and hostile learning environment which sometimes make women become 'outsiders' are likely to slow down their ability to participate and perform well in different university programmes. The objective of the present study was to explore ways in which sexual harassment affect women students' access to opportunities and facilities in the University of Nairobi. To achieve this objective, the researcher generated qualitative data from 30 in-depth interviews. Analysis of data, as discourse, was used to construct the meaning of men and women students' perceptions of their experiences of sexual harassment and the extent to which this impacts on their access to opportunities and facilities. The research findings reveal that fear instilled by occurrences of sexual harassment, intimidation and sexual favours make it challenging for some women students to access supplementary sources of income, halls of residence, library and catering facilities. The research concludes that women students in the University of Nairobi experience discrimination at different levels: social and economic probably due to patriarchal norms and structures. The article is part of the findings from my PhD dissertation.

Key words: *sexual harassment; access; opportunities; facilities; chilly climate.*

1.0 Introduction

World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century 1998 Article 3 and 6 mentions the need for Higher Education institutions to create a supportive learning environment that enhances equity of access by students and staff. Supportive environment means secure and safe environment, an aspect anchored in Kenya's Vision 2030. During the African Ministerial Preparatory meeting for the 58 Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW58) held in February 2014 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the participants noted the slow and uneven progress towards the achievement of gender equality, a Millennium Development Goals. This can partly be attributed to lack of a conducive environment sometimes brought about by the violence students experience in the institutions of higher learning. In their support, feminist scholars, Tamale and Oloka-Onyango, (1997) and Yahya-Othman (2000) noted that the working university environment of women, remains different from that of men, and is likely to contribute to discrimination. Sexual harassment has been reported as barrier to women's participation in varied university programmes (Gunawardena, Kwesiga, Lihamba, Morley, Odejide, Shackleton & Sorhaindo, 2004). This means that sexual harassment is likely to prevent women staff and students from achieving their rightful place in education (Menon, Shilalukey, Siziya, Ndubani, Musepa, Malungo, Munalula, Mwela & Serpell, 2009).

Feminists document women experiences showing the extent to which campus climate is sometimes 'chilly'. The phrase 'chilly climate' is usually refers to unfriendly environment that surround women students and staff (Ruth, 2000). The chilly climate usually characterised with 'micro-inequities' (Sandler and Hall, 1991), often seen as norm, obstacles and barrier to the achievement of gender equity and equality (Ndlovu, 2001; Creighton and Yieke, 2006), limit women's opportunities to achieving professional growth (Sandler and Hall, 1991). 'Chilly climate' includes discourses of being ignored, treated differently or sexually harassed (Morris and Daniel, 2008), isolated and outsiders (Sandler and Hall, 1991). Within a 'chilly climate' women may encounter hostility to their professional authority, for instance, men's intrusion in areas of responsibility and institutional practices like meetings (Sandler and Hall, 1991; Onsongo, 2006; 2007; Barnes, 2007). The hostile environment may be characterised by unwanted sexual behaviours (Onsongo, 2004; Menon, *et al*, 2009). Further, Ruth (2000) observes that 'chilly climate' are ways in which women are sidelined in favour of masculine behaviour. Campus climate seems to be related to students' attitudes about their perceptions of and lived experiences with the environment (Peterson and Spencer, 1990), which is likely to affect their access to opportunities and facilities in universities (Bunyi, 2008; Menon, *et al*, 2009). To be able to find out the extent to which hostile campus environment is likely to disadvantage students participation, performance and access to opportunities, facilities, Hall and Sandler (1984) noted the need for researchers to explore students' experiences with support services, employment, health care, life in the dormitories or halls of residence and lecture halls, governance and leadership.

Literature on the experiences of men and women students in accessing formal and informal structures on campus is limited and scanty in Kenya. Thus, there was need to conduct a qualitative study in order to obtain rich descriptions of men and women student's lived experiences, a way of identifying challenges they encounter so as to answer the question about women's under-representation and their low participation at different levels of the university (Harper, 2007; Adusah-Karikari, 2008). This information is important because as Vaccaro (2010) reveals that, it is not until campuses know how women experience their particular climates, that positive change can be effected. Thus, findings of this study

could go a long way in improving access with the goal of attaining gender equality, a critical component of sustainable development (Huggins and Randell, 2007).

A number of scholars have explored the effects of sexual harassment on students. For instance, Tlou and Letsie (1997) found that most victims of sexual harassment in the University of Botswana are isolated, ashamed, suffer in silence, blame themselves and remain reserved. Further Reuben (1999), Phiri, (2000), Yayha-Othman, (2000), Shumba and Matina (2002), Adedokun (2005) and Menon, *et al* (2009) reported poor performance, mental health functions (depression, psychological trauma, anger, attempted suicide and sometimes death), stigmatisation, victimisation, and hatred of men as perpetrators, loss of confidence and self-esteem, sexually transmitted infectious diseases and unwanted pregnancies as some of the effects of sexual harassment. However, none of the studies reported how sexual harassment affects women students' access to opportunities and facilities, an aspect likely to contribute to gender inequalities. The researcher allowed men and women students in the University of Nairobi to give their experiences of how sexual harassment affect their access to opportunities and facilities. By enabling men to acknowledge the effects of sexual harassment on women students' access to opportunities and facilities, this should be seen as a step towards envisioning men's participation in creating friendly policies and programmes for purposes of achieving gender equality. It is important to note that in countries where men have been integrated into the change campaigns, reports of using physical violence against women have drastically reduced (Okeyo, 2014).

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Liberal feminism champion equality, legal, political rights, natural justice and democracy if women are to compete with men in the public domain (Connelly, Murray, MacDonald & Parpart, 2000; Ray, 2007; McLaren, George & Cornell, 2008). Liberal feminists focus on issues of equal rights of access to resources for men and women especially in education, work, employment and support of affirmative action as a compensatory strategy. These aspects informed the researcher on the need to explore discourses of men and women students' access to opportunities (degree courses and supplementary sources of income) and facilities, a way of deepening our understanding regarding the nature of gender inequities in the University of Nairobi.

Susan Moller Okin, a liberal feminist argues that power as a resource which is unequally and unjustly distributed between men and women can be used to explain the inequalities existing in the society. It is by redistributing the resources and opportunities in more equitable ways, ensuring that laws and policies are not discriminative that justice can be established. Further, Kanter (1977) in Kamau (2009) noted that in order to improve the situation of women in organisations, there is need to understand the basic organisational and structural issues. This did justify the researchers' use of formal and informal structures, since such information could help in conceptualising issues of access. Kanter (1977) in Kamau, (2009) are in agreement with radical feminists that for any change to occur, a critique of patriarchal systems and structures is necessary. This means that for policies and programmes to change, systems and structures that govern them need to be well understood, and revised, if necessary.

3.0 Methodology

The study was done in the University of Nairobi, one of the leading international teaching and research institution in Sub-Saharan Africa. University of Nairobi has over 62, 000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in a wide range of study programmes. University of Nairobi is ISO 9001:2000 certified, which means that the university can now benchmark with the best in the world since it has met international standards. In the best performance ever since the inception of Web Ranking of Universities 11 years ago, in July 2014 the University of Nairobi was at position nine in Africa out of 1307 universities. The ranking confirms the scholarly competitive edge the University of Nairobi has continued to maintain. A World Class University committed to scholarly excellence, University of Nairobi is looked upon as the yardstick by which university education is measured in Kenya (University of Nairobi, 2006). With these unique developmental milestones the researcher was motivated by the need to understand the gendered nature of inequalities by exploring the extent to which sexual harassment could be affecting women students' access to opportunities and facilities.

The study was guided by cross-sectional survey design. The design provides a picture of the University of Nairobi as it stands at a point in time (Kumar, 2005). Thus, the design allows for in depth exploration (Ahuja, 2003) of students experiences of sexual harassment at that particular time, which gave the researcher an opportunity to use qualitative methods against quantitative. Vaccaro (2010) reveals that numerical representations give little about men and women's lived experiences. Thus, qualitative methods allowed the researcher, to establish ethical partnerships with the students which led to generation of deeper insights and understanding (Higgs, 2010) of their experiences in their attempt to access campus opportunities and facilities. While qualitative methods answer questions about how and why people make sense of the social world, Ulin, Robinson, Tolley and McNeill, (2002) appreciates its enormous strength of being able to address dimensions of human actions and behaviour, through interaction at a particular time. Use of in-depth interviews, as one of the most commonly recognised forms of qualitative methods provided the researcher with a platform for amplifying the silenced voices of men and women students through social interactions (Mishler, 1986 in Alldred, 2000). Voice in feminist literature help to reveal the contradictions, fragmentations, conflicts and tensions presented in students' perceptions and experiences (Song, 2000; Mawoyo and Hoadley, 2007), in order to ensure that marginalised voices are heard ((Adusah-Karikari, 2008). Thus, use of voice in this study enabled the researcher to make direct and indirect experiences of men and women students visible and relevant for practice (Aniekwu, 2006).

The choice of fourth year students as target population was partly informed by time factor and feminist standpoint theorists. Fourth years represent the most senior students across the six colleges of the University of Nairobi. They are usually on campus for a longer period of time than first, second and third year students. Thus, the length of time one stays at the university increase the chances of being exposed to a wide variety of experiences (Kelly and Parsons, 2000), which could lead to higher rate of sexual prevalence's (Menon, *et al*, 2009). In addition, Nancy Hartsock, a proponent of

feminist standpoint theorist, questions the provision of knowledge by those in positions of authority and power. Hartsock (1983) in Westmarland (2001) makes it clear that those in power can only produce partial knowledge. That is probably why Wood (1993) suggests that the perceptions of subordinate groups (students) are more complete and better than those of privileged groups (teaching and non-teaching staff) in the society, since the subordinates are more clear of the discriminatory practices going on around them.

The selection of the respondents among fourth year students was done through volunteer and simple random sampling (lottery) techniques. Use of more than one sampling procedures in this study was important since it allowed the researcher to get men and women students who were willing to talk about what they had personally experienced or heard about sexual harassment on campus. Thus, the researcher settled on 30 students (16 women and 14 men) since as Ellsberg and Heise, (2005), Harper, (2007) have shown that the fewer the respondents, the more one is likely to obtain rich information to inform policy. Data was collected through the use of a digital recorder, after which it was transcribed and analysed using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis was relevant to this study because it enhances in depth analysis of data. Further, discourse analysis offers a way of constructing men and women as active subjects, not objects through emphasis on 'talk' and 'text' as data sources (Alldred, 2000; Mason, 2002; Griffin, 2007). Through discourse analysis, the researcher was able to code and categorise the primary patterns of data in form of words, sentences and phrases from the written narratives. The researcher further obtained emerging themes/patterns by grouping topics/statements which seemed similar, while noting the differences. Mason (2002) notes that coding of data into categories help get systematic overview of data in terms of theoretical, conceptual and analytical thinking. Being a sensitive research, means that sexual harassment is surrounded by embarrassment, victimisation, silence, ignorance, secrecy, stigma, threats and discrimination (Lee, 1993; World Health Organisation, 2001; Jansen, Hilber and Johansen, 2006; Kamau, 2009). Therefore, the researcher considered ethical issues, especially that of maintaining privacy and confidentiality of men and women students during the interviews and disseminating the findings (Muasya and Gatumu, 2013; Muasya 2013a; Muasya, 2013b).

4.0 Presentation of Research Findings

Women students in the University of Nairobi spoke of fear which is probably a result of threats, intimidation and risky sexual behaviours which tend to create a chilly learning environment. This to some extent affect women students attempt to access campus opportunities such as supplementary sources of income, common university facilities (such as accommodation (rooms/toilets/bathrooms), catering, library and swimming pool, which are important if one has to effectively participate in academic programmes.

4.1.1 Opportunities on Campus

The study findings reveal that intimidation, threats and transactional sex affect students' access to campus opportunities. Commenting on how intimidation is related to women students transferring their degree courses, C8M says:

...these courses are intimidating the lecturers sometimes are not friendly...there is no that friendly mode...mostly the female students cannot stand that kind of environment so that's why most of them quit either in first year or second year ...the faculty is very unfair it doesn't really cater for the female students....(C8M)

Although three respondents had similar views regarding the intimidation of some women students in class by men lecturers, one explicitly stated:

...there is one who was asking us you mean here in front there are only girls you know he is against the ladies... another day only ladies put up their hands na akasema kwani hakuna kijana anaweza kuinua mkon juu (you mean there is no boy who can raise up his hands)...I also think they are also going to have some harassment from the guys because like they will always look down at you hii course ni ya majamaa (this course is for men) you know it can't be done by ladies...(C23F).

Such kind of intimidation may affect women students' participation in class. In their response regarding students' access to income generating activities, seven out of 30 students were of the view that sexual favours tend to determine who gets what sources of income as C18F noted:

...this guy looks at you like ah... give me something ...sexual favours basically so I think it's unfair it's not fair for the ladies...there is that unfairness for the ladies...

Sexual transactions for grades is another area where men and women students spoke of men staff attempting to make use of their academic 'weakness' to threaten and intimidate them with examination failure. This usually happens during the practical examinations, as revealed by five women students. Since some of the students are desperate to pass examinations, majority may succumb to threats, which could lower their self-esteem. While five students specifically talked about this issue, C18F further said

...if you want your grades to go up in most cases they do it...I want first class ...you don't want to fail...there is a lady I know whose boyfriend is a lecturer... she has to do what this guy wants because if she doesn't she will fail....

Out of four women students who spoke about transactional sex in order to obtain money and other material benefits like television sets, two said:

*...mmmhh (pause)...ok ahmm (long pause) maybe financial reasons...I know very well that when I go out with him he would give me money and buy you a TV for your room...(C22F).
...I have an example of a lady who was proposing to a lecturer like I want a relationship...because of money...(C17F).*

Further, women students reported of not being able to participate in extracurricular activities such as jogging due to fear created by experiences of sexual harassment. On jogging, C30F expressed her real life ordeal as follows:

... I can't be going jogging everyday in the field ... (probe)... to be careful about what time you are going there... (probe)... like me I have an experience with this road I cannot use this road past 5.30 I cannot never never... yes I had an experience if I wasn't raped I almost got killed... yes I was alone nikashukia (I alighted) it was not so much late mchana kufika hapa nilibebwa juu (when i arrived there I was carried shoulder high) I don't know where those people came from nikabembewa juu (I was carried high'... (probe)... they were three men the next moment you see these flower beds which are here I was on those flower beds (pointing out at the flower beds)... (probe)... am a tom boy so am abit sporty so hao watu hawakuweza kunishika (those people they could not get hold of me) am on flower bed ok am very jumpy am very jumpy so they are shikain (holding) me they are vurutaring (pulling) me towards the bridge so I ran I ran I don't know who they were looking for I just threw everything that I was carrying... (probe)... yah... vehicles were passing... I saw some gari (car) but this gari ikadivert ikakuja ikasimama hapo (I saw a vehicle coming, it diverted and then it stopped) and then these people ran away ... they just came wakaninurse (they came and gave me first aid)...

The traumatic experiences could have left the victim frightened, limiting her movements at certain times of the day and also making it difficult for her to go for jogging.

4.1.2 Campus Facilities

Students mentioned halls of residence, cafeteria, library, swimming pool and lecture halls as facilities they sometimes found challenging to access. Speaking about some of the sexual behaviours likely to affect women students' access to Halls of Residence, one female student said:

...you are passing and the guys are all over the place they are just idlers you know it's intimidating... you don't feel nice you don't feel comfortable about it so I don't like the idea of sharing the halls... (C23F).

Sometimes fear of sexual harassment tend to limit women students' movements in the Halls of Residence to such an extent that they avoid using facilities such as toilets, especially at night. C30F raised this point when she was asked to comment on the issue of women students sharing the Halls of Residence with their men counterparts:

...they will go drinking they are so excited you can't walk along this corridor (pointing at the corridor) I don't think it's very safe especially for students after one in the night student are just drunk around... like me when I get to the room especially that period I cannot get out ati niende loo kukojoa siwezi (I go to the toilet to urinate I can't)... you feel insecure... at night there are men all over you are not sure you can't be very sure.... (C30F).

It is clear from the students' interviews that fear of sexual harassment could affect Module II (privately sponsored) students as they attempt to obtain accommodation facilities, since they are not usually considered for university accommodation. C29F said:

...I think sexual so that they can get room like you may find that parallel students they are not entitled to rooms first priority is regular student and you find a regular student has missed a room and a parallel female student has gotten a room and you hear that they have had an affair... (C29F).

Women students talked of some women victims expressing their fear by crying, making loud noises, a way of drawing attention that they are probably in danger. Screaming is sometimes an expression of fear. Although this was mentioned by three women students while referring to different incidences, C19F stated:

...you find a guy just peeping you you can't see him you are just bathing so the lady ended up screaming she thought this was just a rapist.... (C19F).

Fear sometimes prevented some women students from accessing cafeteria. Speaking about what she had heard, C20F said:

...you are told you can't go to the MESS alone you have to go with a man that's what my colleagues were being told I think that's why I have an attitude of not going to the MESS... (C20F)

The fear was presented as a generalised condition of some women students' daily lives at the campus, particularly when using washrooms in the Halls of Residence. The emotional state of fear and need for protection defines the feminine characteristics, and to some extent reveals the unfriendly nature of the university environment. By issuing threats to women students, men students and staff want to sometimes be in control of the structures and practices on campus, which could in a way deny women students access to important facilities.

Commenting on how harassment sometimes hinder women students from accessing the library facilities, C10M says:

...I think the female gender... find it hard even to walk into the library because there are some benches that are meant for relaxing outside the library and the male students have nicknamed it that place DSTV where they just sit there they watch female students ... so it's an issue that female students are actually harassed.... (C10M).

The study findings revealed that some women students are reluctant to use the university swimming pool or even walk near where men students are sitting due to fear of becoming victims of sexual harassment. On the use of the swimming pool, one female student said:

...to be stared at you know me I hear most men go 'there' to just to look at how are you jumping how are your thighs (...haa...haaa... ha-ha...laughter) later you hear stories from class that discourages people from going there (swimming pool) ...because of the fear to be stared at you....(C20F).

Similarly, but under different circumstances, two women students said that they are afraid when they pass in front of men students, as C24F noted:

...first they are all boys who are big ok most of them are big so definitely when they are approaching you fear...ehee...hee...(laughter) they drink...over drink then...they also don't respect women coz when a woman pass they say checki huyo (look at this one) you know is bad...especially for women they don't care they can beat you up....(C24F).

The terms 'big boys' implies the masculine nature of the men students, as women are seen to lack assertiveness, an important aspect of life skills education. An important observation is that none of the men students interviewed spoke about fear, or women students not being able to access campus opportunities and facilities, probably because men students seem to have conceptualised sexual harassment as 'normal' and 'natural', thus it does not seem to affect them negatively.

5.0 Discussion of the Research Findings

The idea of masculine traits found in the stories of men and women tend to discourage some women students from accessing and participating, for instance, in the academic programmes and extracurricular activities like jogging, which could affect achievement of gender equity. Bunyi (2004) notes that the socialisation process help women and men learn gender stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity, which determines their ability to access and participate in various programmes and activities. Susan Moller Okin, a liberal feminist theorist, noted the importance of distributing resources and opportunities equally, if gender equity has to be achieved.

Ndlovu (2001) and Labedo (2003) noted that 'weak' students are usually desperate for academic awards. This concurs with Vohlidalova (2011) findings which reveal that weak and naïve women students are usually victims of sexual harassment. 'Weakness' is a feminine characteristic used by patriarchal society to dominate and sexually exploit women students. Research findings shows that threats and intimidation of women students by men lecturers from the University of Nairobi are likely to make women students feel frustrated, thus eroding their self-confidence and esteem. Use of patriarchal powers by men to victimise and instill fear in women students is likely to make them comply with their sexual needs and desires (Shumba and Matina, 2002). This observation is a pointer to the University of Nairobi regarding the state of security of women students as they attempt to for instance, get into Halls of Residence and swimming pool, of which it is the responsibility of the university to provide them with adequate protection.

Fear of sexual harassment tends to impinge on the freedom and mobility of women students on campus (Mama, 2009). Omale (2000) and Mulugeta's (2007) findings complement what men and women students from University of Nairobi said regarding their access and use of the library, that women fear being pestered by men students. Similarly, fear as highlighted by Naidoo and Rajab (1999), Phiri (2000), Omale (2000) and Imasogie (2002) affects students' access to cafeteria. Omale (2000) reports on how women students preferred cooking and eating in their rooms, avoiding social functions on campus. Thus, as Mackinnon (1979) argues, sexual harassment is a tool through which men enforce women's dominance, keep them in subordinate positions and push them out of positions in which they could compete with men.

Sexual harassment affects women students' ability to pursue their studies and careers in a friendly environment (Imasogie, 2002), which means that women are professionally and socially isolated in academic and college activities (Sandler, 1991). Although similar findings were recorded by Omale (2000) and Adedokun (2005), these researchers relied on the views of women students. Yet, by enabling men students, like was the case in the present study, to, acknowledge the effects of sexual harassment is significant, since it provides a hope for developing empathy among men students upon which their participation in formulating and implementing strategies can be envisioned. In addition, Okeyo (2014) feels that decision making roles and power in the economic, political and social spheres could necessitates men's commitments to eradicating sexual harassment in the educational institutions and society in general.

6.0 Conclusion

There is evidence to show that sexual harassment seems to be affecting women students more than the men, in their attempt to access opportunities and facilities on campus. Thus, women students tend to bear the burden and cost of sexual harassment. Consequently, some women students develop fear, characterised with feelings of embarrassment and intimidation, which tends to affect access. Such symptoms could further make them afraid of competition, withdraw from programmes and fail to use available facilities and opportunities putting them at a more disadvantaged position compared to their men counterparts. Yet, provision of a conducive learning environment, is important for the achievement of gender equity and equality, usually enriched in Kenya's Constitution 2010, Vision 2030 and University of Nairobi's Strategic Plan 2013-2018. A key recommendation adopted at the CSW58 is to address violence against girls and women in the Post-2015 development Agenda. Thus, provision of a comprehensive empowerment programmes and guidance and counselling programmes (Muasya, 2013a; Muasya 2013b) may go along to help the disadvantaged women students be able to cope with some of the challenges they encounter on campus.

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