Exploring Men and Women Students Experiences of Sexual Harassment: A Case Study of one Public University in Kenya

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Abstract

Gender analysis deals with ways in which the lives, experiences, needs, interests, priorities and capacities of men and women are different. We did recognise that by presenting different experiences and constructs of men and women students, this could lead to a clearer exploration, explanation and understanding of the discourses of sexual harassment in a university culture. In the introduction and theoretical framework, the researchers present the rationale of involving men and women students in a study of sexual harassment. A detailed methodology showing how 30 (14 men and 16 women students) were sampled and their level of participation in the in-depth interviews is presented. Being a gender study, use of multiple discourses to analyse and present data helped the researchers to further understand the deeper meaning of men and women student's direct experiences of sexual harassment. The researchers present and discuss five cases of sexual harassment, namely, peeping, sexually suggestive talk, attempted gang rape, sexually transmitted marks and non-verbal sexual intimidation. The findings concur with those of other researchers who noted that women tend to share more experiences of sexual harassment to women researchers as compared to men. It is important for researchers to involve men as active participants in gender studies, because they are more likely to understand challenges and experiences of women, thus be able to participate more effectively in prevention measures, strategies or programs.

Keywords: Sexual harassment; experiences; men; women; sexually transmitted marks

1.0 Introduction

Society is made up of men and women with different focus, needs, interests and priorities in their social, cultural, political and economic discourses (Weeden, 1987, in Morosi and Moletsane, 2007; Kamau, 2009). Because of these diversities, men and women hear, interpret, express and present messages in gendered ways (Muhanguzi, 2005). Thus, Ellsberg and Heise (2005); EQUATE Project (2008); Plan International (2011), have noted the need to specifically consider opinions, perceptions and experiences of individual men and women in research. Information from men and women would go a long way in suggesting transformative changes which can be used to eliminate discrimination and oppression (EQUATE Project, 2008; Plan International, 2011), in the society. Such gendered knowledge is important since achievement of gender equality is all about the role of boys and men, and not an issue of women and girls alone (Plan International, 2011). The knowledge could lead to the creation of gender sensitive policies (Kinyanjui, 1995) and programmes. This supports Kamau's (2009) sentiments that equality between men and women can only be achieved if their differences are appreciated and included in policy and practice.

By including men and women students in the study, this enabled the researchers to clearly understand the gendered nature of the institution, further giving an opportunity for a deeper exploration of students' experiences, interactions and processes which lead to sexual harassment (Ruth, 2000; Steyn and van Zyl, 2001; Martin, 2004), a key discourse of institutional culture. The idea of using men and women students in the present study was further informed by: Chisholm *et al* (2007), Pereira (2007), Adusah-Karikari (2008), Rampele and Brito (2008), Kabira (2009).

In particular, Rampele and Brito (2008), Adusah-Karikari (2008) and Kabira, (2009) noted the need for women researchers to privilege and amplify women's voices in the institutions of Higher Education since such information could find its way into academic and policy debates.

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While Morley (2004; 2005) asserts that the absence of women's voices can affect organisational priorities, performance indicators and cultural traditions, Krook (2007) noted the importance of allowing women to speak about their everyday lives, especially when in marginalised positions.

Studies that allow men to participate, are likely to make them take responsibility of changing masculinist features of the university culture, in particular those aspects that seem to discriminate and disadvantage women students (Pereira, 2007). Consequently, as McCarrey, President of Plan International Canada argues, involving men in a study of sexual harassment make them become active supporters and proponents of gender equality (Plan International, 2011). The idea of including men students as participants in this study was further informed by Samia Afroz Rahim in Cornwall Murray Li, MacDonald (2007), in a Symposium on *'Politicising Masculinities: Beyond the Personal'* in Dakar, Senegal while responding to a question on the importance of understanding concept of masculinity. In addition, the idea of supporting boys and men's participation in creating policies to improve sexuality knowledge, and achieve gender equality is well stipulated in *'The State of World Girls Report'* by Plan International, 2011. It is only by including men in such a study that they will be in a position to know the importance of sharing and being part of broad, healthy, safe and rich cultural experiences (UNESCO, 2004), while being powerful allies in prevention of sexual assault (Stathopoulos, 2013).

1.1 Theoretical framework of the Study

Being a gender study, theoretical framework was partly informed by patriarchy and radical feminist theories. Radical feminism asserts that the cause of inequality arises from men controlling women (Ray, 2007). Some of the structures that reinforce men supremacy, dominance and which informed the present study can be seen in the patriarchal construction of knowledge, different aspects of sexual oppression and heterosexuality (Ray, 2007; Beechey, 1979). According to radical feminist, rape should be seen in the context of heterosexual relationships and practices, which are sometimes exploitative towards women due to control and dominance that men exert in socio-political and economic spheres (Murphy, 2004). To radical feminist the oppression of women is inevitable in men dominated societies (Schaefer, 2004), since men have power over women in most aspects (political, social, economic) of life. Radical feminists argue that for any change to occur and to achieve equality, it is imperative to challenge women's subordination and work towards transforming society by abolishing patriarchy (Connelly, Murray Li, MacDonald and Parpart, 2000).

Patriarchy presents men as those with power and control over women, dominating them culturally and socially (Walby, 1990). According to Courtenay (2000), for men to demonstrate that they are 'real men' they must conform to cultural definitions of masculine beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and occupations. Further, we share with Mbuyiselo Botha, in Cornwall, Edstrom and Greig (2007) sentiments that masculinity is about men perceiving and thinking about benefits and the power which give them access to certain privileges as compared to women. We are drawn to arguments by Home and Maraa (2010) that masculine (dominance and control of power), and feminine (subordination and lack of power) behaviours are constantly reinforced in daily interaction in flexible, dynamic, ambiguous, predictable and unpredictable ways. Due to different power structures, men and women have learnt to accept positions and roles as given, hardly questioning the set rules and regulations (Kamau, 2009). Thus, sexual harassment, a discourse explored in the present study is according to Labedo (2003) a tool used to dominate and sometimes keep women in a vulnerable and subordinate position.

Men's aggressive and competitive behaviour and women's passive and acquiescent behaviours have normally been rewarded because society sees it as natural, normal and appropriate (Moulton, 1983 in Karlberg, 2005; Tangri, Bart and Johnson 1982 in Hagedorn, 2000). Therefore, patriarchal society expects men to be 'macho', strong, tough, dominant and powerful, while women are supposed to be sweet, demure, attractive and in need of men leadership (Hagedorn, 2000; Timmerman, 2003). It seems that masculine and feminine characteristics are constructed by patriarchal society, a way of justifying certain behaviours and actions, which then influences my understanding of intersection of gender and sexual harassment. While masculinity tend to undermine women's capacity to engage and make appropriate decisions within an institution, men's autonomy is sometimes taken for granted (Pereira, 2007). Consequently, construction of masculinity and femininity, a process which often goes unnoticed guided the researchers in trying to conceptualise how the relationship between men and women is formulated and lived out (Cornwall*, et.al* 2007; Dube, 2003).

This did place the researchers in a position of being able to understand ways in which women are often silenced by occurrences of different forms of sexual harassment.

By understanding the 'norms' of masculinity, which serve as structures of privileging men, as opposed to feminine traits like caring, kindness, friendliness, helping, supporting, modesty, conscientiousness and cooperation (Laitinen, 2003; Karlberg, 2005), this helped the researchers recognise that society is made up of men and women who require different focus and treatment.

Thus, throughout the research process, and especially during sampling, data collection, analysis and discussion of research findings, we treated men and women students as different entities.

1.2 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Basing our arguments on Marxist School of thought, Hartsock (1983) in Mason (2002) noted that women are in a better position of viewing gender relations as socially constructed due to their experiences of gender subordination, as compared to men who try to protect their positions in authority. Hartsock contends that women understand life differently because they live in marginalised social relationships and as such, they are able to present fundamental, complete and less distorted knowledge (Harding, 1986 in Westmarland, 2001) by uncovering what seems to be hidden within their daily interactions. In addition, Dubois (1983) in Westmarland (2001) states that what has been named 'universal' knowledge is often seen as man's knowledge derived from men scholarships and therefore, fundamentally flawed. This made the researchers to use men and women students, in order to compare their different views, perceptions and experiences regarding their experiences of sexual harassment. By allowing women students to freely 'voice' their unique realities or what Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 64) refer to as *'women speaking their truth'*, it was important since it gave them a 'voice', which is in most cases is silenced and ignored by patriarchal society.

In her argument, Nancy Hartsock in Ramazonoglu and Holland, (2002), makes it clear that patriarchal knowledge is powerful since it helps conceptualise patriarchy and its operation, structure material relations of gender, in which both men and women are required to participate. Using diversified gendered realities, the researchers was in a position to generate a range of social situations, relationships and their interconnections (Ramazonoglu and Holland, 2002), within the context of patriarchal power dynamics. The assumption is that the gendered knowledge obtained from the perceptions and concrete realities of men and women students would help uncover in-depth nature of sexual harassment on campus. Volunteer and simple random sampling (lottery) techniques was used to obtain 30 (16 women and 14 men) to participate in the in-depth interviews. According to Ellsberg and Heise (2005), about 10 to 30 interviews is a good representative sample in any qualitative research.

1.3 Using In-Depth Interviews to Collect Data from Men and Women Students

Qualitative tools, in particular interviews help researchers to understand the 'how' and 'why' of the discourses being studied. Interviews give a voice to participants, even for issues that seem technical, while recognising that men and women from any socio-economic background have valuable experiences and knowledge (Brigitte, 2009). Our experience in this study is that the level of students' participation during the interviews varied by gender. Women students seemed to talk more during the interviews, showing enthusiasm, while giving vivid narratives of their thoughts and feelings regarding gendered realities of sexual harassment as compared to men. According to Bogdan and Bilken (1998), feminist researchers usually comment on how easy it is for women as compared to men to open up to women researchers when using face to face interviews. Similarly, while exploring gender dynamics and sexuality in Uganda's secondary schools, Muhanguzi (2005) asserted that girls contributed richer and diversified information (data) than boys.

While explaining issues of gender differences when collecting data, a number of scholars share the following views: Finch (1984) in Bogdan and Bilken (1998) noted that women researchers tend to get richer information from women respondents, and especially where they have been given fewer opportunities to talk about issues central to their lives. May (1997) and Muhanguzi (2005) attributes the low level of participation by boys during the face-to-face interviews to the gender of a researcher. Despite the fact that in this study the researchers was a woman, there were times during the interviewing process when women students remained silent, while others were hesitant to respond to sensitive questions on the realities of sexual harassment. But as Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, and McNeill (2002), Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue, women's hesitation to participate in a study should not be interpreted as a show of ignorance or fear, instead women should be given an opportunity to think of how to express themselves, especially when dealing with sensitive information.

Going by Rubin and Rubin's (2005) and Barbara (2010) suggestions, the researchers was patient with hesitations and silences, thus, giving women students enough time to reconstruct and reflect on their thoughts in regard to their experiences of sexual harassment. This is in line with Brigitte (2009) sentiments that a gender sensitive study should use methods and tools that are participatory, respectful and accountable to men and women.

1.4 Gendered Approach in the Analysis and Management of Research Findings

Data analysis is usually determined and shaped by theoretical approach within which the study is done (Patton, 2002). Being a gender study, this meant sorting and analysing data based on the unique responses of men and women students. Use of multiple gendered discourses did help the researchers to theorise and understand the meaning of data collected while considering different accounts and experiences of men and women students (Song, 2000; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The diversified gendered realities found in the voices of men and women students proved significant in this study especially where they tended to disagree and agree in their stories of their experiences of sexual harassment. In this study, the voices of men and women students were amplified and transformed into theory (Mauthner and Doucet, 2000) through data analysis. By using gender analysis, we were able to critically examine differences in women's and men's lives, while highlighting gender-specific variables related to sexual harassment which can be used to achieve positive change for all in the society (UNFPA, 2013).

Use of gender approach during data analysis gave the researchers an opportunity to engage in diversified understanding of the complex nature of sexual harassment in this public university. While transcribing the recorded data into verbatim transcriptions, we carefully listened to each of the audio files in order to get exactly what Gillman (2003) refers to as a feel or impression of the whole information. This was followed by writing down all the content from the recorded interviews, or what Birch (2000), Patton (2002), Gillman (2003), and Wengraf (2004) refer to as 'verbatim', narrative reports or textual representation of the audio interviews. Transcribing each interview word by word was important because verbatim means '*complete*' with nothing left out even the pauses, hesitations, commas, colons and full stops (Wengraf, 2004: 213).

Through content or discourse analysis, we were able to identify codes which we used to categorise the primary patterns of data into emerging themes, words, sentences and phrases in line with the research objectives. We did this by attaching labels or codes to written text representing the specific themes. The categorisation meant grouping, sorting and separating relevant materials using selected sub-topics into meaningful clusters (Bogdan and Bilken, 1998; Patton, 2002). Categorisation make analysis of large data easier and accurate, since one is able to assemble under one concept/idea many disparate pieces of text materials, thus, allows researcher to search for connections among them (Ulin *et al,* 2002). Data was used to clarify identified categories in order to develop what Patton (2002), Miles and Huberman (1994) refers to as illumination of 'thick' description. The 'thick' description represents actual 'voices' (now translated into written words) as is evidenced by the five sampled cases (stories) of men and women students' direct experiences and realities of sexual harassment presented in the next sub-section.

1.5 Stories of Students' Direct Experiences of Sexual Harassment

The specific cases of sexual harassment experienced by men (one out of 14) and women students (four out of 16) involved a range of gendered discourses: peeping, sexually suggestive talk, attempted gang rape, sexually transmitted marks and non-verbal sexual intimidation.

1.5.1 Case One: Peeping

In sharing a detailed life account of how she became a victim of peeping, C29F said:

…ehii yah hee…hee…hee…(laughter)…we have had incidences where male students would peep in the bathrooms where female students are showering, yah it has even happened to me…during the day at around three o'clock then you know when you are showering you put your towel hapo juu ya mlango (up on top of the door) and your pant after you wash it you hang it there so I was showering then I heard some movements so I thought may be its somebody who was going to the loo means 'toilets'…when I finished and I looked back my pant which I had put there wet it was not there it was missing then I heard kumbe (so) this guy was here he had climbed on the wall then he saw I was looking outside he shukaad (climbed down) and he took my inner wear and went with it it happened to like six women in a span of one week yah…(probing)…I think they get satisfied sexually when they do that…may be he doesn't have a girlfriend and he needs to be satisfied on that line sexual yah maybe using that inner wear he will go and do something nasty with it…(C29F).

C29F believe that the idea of perpetrators stealing of under wears and 'peeping' at women showering, is a way of men trying to satisfy their sexual desires.

1.5.2 Case Two: Sexually Suggestive Talks

C26F gave sexually suggestive talks, as an example of verbal sexual harassment. She spoke about her experiences with a group of men students on campus saying:

…one guy stands up and says ah huyo wachaneni na yeye (that one leave her alone) then another one says that girl is so cheap she came to my room we had sex then I dumped her…

yah it happens to most of them they see a girl they say like you see that girl I have had her even me so they talk that way and maybe that girl she is so naïve so another guy says something maybe he is in the group they talk about another one (probe)…yah they tried to do that to me me I brushed them off…(C26F).

These comments suggest the naive status of some women students, which could make them easy targets or victims of sexual harassment by men students.

1.5.3 Case Three: Attempted Gang Rape

In case three, a woman student narrated her ordeal with three strangers on the roadside while walking to campus in the evening. Although C30F narrowly escaped with the assistance of passers-by who stopped to rescue her, in her story she tries to explain why she cannot go out for jogging in the evening. C30F says:

… 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 <u>nikashukia (</u>I alighted) it was not so much late <u>mchana kufika hapa nilibebwa juu</u> (when i arrived there I was carried shoulder high) I don't know where those people came from <u>nikabembewa juu (</u>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 a bit sporty so <u>hao watu hawakuweza kunishika</u> (those people they could not get hold of me) am on flower bed ok am very jumpy am very jumpy so they are <u>shikain (</u>holding)me they are <u>vurutaring</u> (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 <u>gari</u> (car) but this <u>gari ikadivert ikakuja ikasimama hapo</u> (I saw a vehicle coming, it diverted and then it stopped) and then these people ran away ...they just came <u>wakaninurse</u> (they came and gave me first aid)...(C30F).

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

1.5.4 Case Four: Quid Pro Quo Transactions: Sexually Transmitted Marks

In case four, C22F narrated a story of how she almost became a victim of quid pro transactions, while responding to the question of whether she knows a colleague who had been sexually harassed on campus. The following is her story:

…you know sometimes like me personally I have experienced it…(probe)…you know this lecturer wanted to pack up... like to bow down and all that and me I couldn't do that…(long pause) ok like we really 'sucked up' with him you know…(probe)…sucked up as in ni kama you means 'it's like you' (pause) you really want to please him you know so that he will do a favor for you some of them used to do it…(probe)… so he dated me for an exchange …(probe)…you know…it <u>fikaad</u> (reached a point) I thought that he would mark my administration admission yah and when he is marking he is seeing and <u>failisha</u> (fail me) me you know but I thank God I actually prayed I really prayed that God would just do something that he doesn't see my number and when the results came out I was like the second best …(C22F).

The idea of the lecturer wanting to master woman students' registration number makes her afraid of sitting for the examinations. The story shows the extent to which one male lecturer attempted to fail a woman student in her examinations because she had refused to submit to sexual favours. In an emotional state, C22F continued with her story:

...yah passing…I used to cry (emotionally expressed…tears falling down)…by the time you come out of that class you feel like the world is just against you yah I had cried cried cried…I talked to my friends…they used to see me crying…he looked at the results and he looked at me and he is like are you sure that's your number no…that really put me down I cried I cried in his face by the way coz the other times I used to cry in after wards…I couldn't talk all I could do is cry I cried a lot then he is asking me if I have wronged you forgive me…do you need someone to talk to I can take you out…so I thank God…I actually thank God that the lecturer went to do his masters degree course…

The fact that these activities were taking place in a lecture room is an indication that sexual harassment can occur in an ordinary academic space. This show how sometimes women students are at times left at the mercy of men lecturers an indication of the extent to which they are vulnerable to sexual abuse on campus both in and out of the lecture rooms.

1.5.5 Case Five: Non-Verbal Sexual Intimidation

Out of 14 men students who participated in depth interviews, only C9M narrated an incident where he was a direct victim of non-verbal sexual intimidation, surprisingly by a man. The perpetrator used to send C9M messages via email. He narrated the story as follows:

...I remember I don't remember who it was…but there is a time (a long pause) there was a time actually there was somebody who texted me no actually wrote an email I mean wrote me an email…(probe)…a male I guess because the kind of stuff that I was getting it had to be a male ah it was so gross…the way you walk I like the way you dress…eh…hee…hee…(laughter from both)…and then you know it's things like I like the way you laugh you know…(C9M).

Words like *'…I like the way you dress and I like the way you laugh…'* mentioned by C9M in the above extract have some sexual connotations. Probably this kind of intimidation is what C9M is referring to as sexual harassment.

What emerges from the stories told by men and women students is evidence of the reality of occurrences of sexual harassment in this public university, as more women students are willing to share their experiences as compared to men. It seems that some women students experience sexual harassment while going about their normal daily activities like showering, studying, jogging and walking in the university compound. It is important to note that only five (four women and one man) out of 30 students interviewed talked about their direct realities of sexual harassment. However, given that this is an exploratory study, the researchers accepted without attempting to extrapolate from their representations of sexual harassment.

1.6 Discussion of Gendered Representations and Reality of Sexual Harassment on Campus

From the accounts of men and women students' drawn from their direct stories, there is evidence to show that students' experience of sexual harassment is presented in a range of verbal, non-verbal and physical to quid pro quo transactions. From their direct experiences, women spoke of a broad range of forms of sexual harassment; attempted gang rape, STM, sexually suggestive language and peeping. Findings from the present study are in agreement with those of Gitobu (1999), Naidoo and Rajab (1999), Simelane (2001) and Imasogie (2002) who reported women experiencing rape or coerced sexual intercourse, actual kissing and fondling of genitals. Peeping, ogling of women students and sending obscene messages through emails are examples of non-verbal sexual harassment men and women students shared with the researchers in this study. Although in women's description peeping took place in bathrooms and sometimes in the toilets, which seems normal, however this contradicts men students' view whereby they perceived peeping as 'abnormal'.

In their studies, Hallman (1994), Gouws and Kritizinger (1997), Hames and Kgosimmele (2005) reported cases of students experiencing peeping in their respective campuses. Hames and Kgosimmele (2005) calls this sexual behaviour as *'peeping Tom'*, while Gouws and Kritizinger (1997) reports about *'panty raids'* where women students under-wears are taken from their residential rooms, after which women are dragged into men's residences while being forced to shower. The information by Gouws and Kritizinger (1997) differs from what women students in the present study revealed about the disappearance of their pants while showering. What emerges from men and women students' stories was a range of challenging behaviour women students sometimes experience on campus which put them in vulnerable positions or victims of unwanted sexual behaviours. Similarly, according to Shumba and Matina (2002), Gouws *et al* (2005) and Britwum (2005) more women students report cases of sexual assault as compared to men. This is probably because women students are more willing to share about their experiences as compared to men (Muhanguzi 2005).

1.7 Conclusion

The university culture tends to place some women students in vulnerable and disadvantaged position and situations of being sexually harassed and discriminated as compared to men. The study has shown that the hidden context in which sexual harassment occurs on campus is partly an indication of the state of gendered inequalities where a number of women students become victims, while men are perpetrators. Such a culture has the effect of depriving women students the ability and freedom to effectively and comfortably participate in various university programmes and activities. The discriminatory practices are to some extent, dominating and oppressive especially the victims of sexual harassment who are mostly women. Thus, there is need to engage, motivate and inspire men in order to make them feel empowered, hence facilitate achievement of gender equality.

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