

**Sexual Harassment against Female Students in Higher Institution:
The Case of Ambo University**
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Abstract

Higher institutions are expected to provide hospitable working environment for students, faculty, staff and community members in order to achieve their goals. Despite creating conducive environment for the teaching - learning activities, sexual harassment is one of the challenging problems encountered in universities. The objective of this study was to assess the practices of sexual harassment against female students in higher institutions, the case of Ambo University. More specifically, the study tried to assess how female students perceive the experience of sexual harassment in their university, find who harasses student; and examine the impacts of sexual harassment on female students in the university. The study was conducted using qualitative research method. Data were collected using in-depth interview, focus group discussions and document analyses. While five female students were involved in-depth interviews and thirteen female students took part in focus group discussions. The study revealed that sexual harassment against female students is a chronic problem in the university. Female students faced all forms of sexual harassment from male students, academic staffs, administrative staffs and outsiders. As a result of sexual harassment, female students faced health, psychological and educational problems. The university, the government and the society need to work together to minimize the problem and create females friendly learning environment.

Key words: Sexual harassment, female students, higher institution

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Higher institutions are expected to be safe working environments for students, faculty and administrative staffs in order to achieve their goals. Despite creating conducive environment for teaching - learning activities; sexual harassment is one of the challenging problems in universities. A number of studies (Bizu et.al, 2009; Hill and Silva, 2005); indicate that sexual harassment is a pervasive and serious problem at all levels of education and across all nations. Bryant cited in Bizu, et.al. (2009), reveals that in the United States of America 86% of female students reported some form of sexual harassment in their schools. Similarly, Hill and Silva (2005), found that in college campuses of the United States of America nearly 62% of students experience some form of sexual harassment during their college education. The Bureau of Justice Statistics of US, cited in Koss; et al (1987), asserted that colleges and university students are at high risk of sexual violence. According to the Bureau, the first and second highest victimization rate for women ranges between the ages of 16 to 19 years-old and 20 to 24 years-old age groups respectively. The victimization rates for these groups are about four times higher than the mean for all women (Bureau of Justice Statistics as cited in Koss, et al, 1987). Another study by Vohlidalová (2011), conducted in Czech University, revealed that 67% of students in MA and BA programs had encountered some form of sexual harassment during their studies, while 22% of students had encountered more serious forms of sexual harassment.

When we come to the African context sexual harassment seems a common problem in educational institutions. As can be noted from different research findings (Okorie, 2014; Kayuni, 2009 Menon, et al, 2009), worryingly the highest percentages of female students in colleges and universities of many African countries have experienced sexual harassment from male faculty, staff and students. A study conducted by Houreld cited in Okorie (2014), asserted that 80%

of women in Nigerian higher institutions reported sexual harassment as their greatest challenge in their attempt to successfully complete their academic goals. As Okorie (2014), has stated, in the past two decade of research on organizational climates of Nigerian universities, sexual harassment appears to be a serious problem since, sexual harassment and victimization in the country has received cold reactions from government and school authorities.

The finding obtained through qualitative study in the University of Malawi's Chancellor College discloses the occurrence of peer (student to student) sexual harassment on campus was high (Kayuni, 2009). The study conducted by Menon, et al (2009), also reveals that vast of the respondents (71.8%) felt that in Zambia university female students were more likely to be harassed than males.

As is the case in many African countries, in Ethiopian universities too, the prevalence rate of sexual harassment of female students is high. In their study; Yeshimebrat, Alemayehu and Firew (2013), depicted that at Bahir Dar University, 35 percent of female respondents were reported to be victims of sexual harassments or attempted sexual assault per year. Similarly, a study conducted by Almaz, et al (2015), shows that at Jimma University the self-reported prevalence rates of physical, verbal and nonverbal sexual harassments of female students were 78.2%, 90.4%, 80.0%, respectively.

Generally, these aforementioned evidences might give an idea about the severity of the problem in all countries irrespective of regional location, group of people, and race. Despite the scarcity of research on sexual harassment of female students, the few researches conducted locally focused more on the prevalence rate of sexual harassment at secondary schools. Besides, their methodologies were more quantitative which may neglect the views and opinions of individuals on specific issues. The other most important reason to conduct this research on this target group was that they are highly risk groups for sexual harassment because of their age. Furthermore, the issue of sexual harassment against female students in higher education is relatively new and unexplored in Ethiopian in general and at Ambo University in particular. Although, in the criminal code of Ethiopia article 620, gender based violence such as abduction and rape are a crimes that make the victimizer punishable to twenty years rigorous imprisonment (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2006), however, sexual harassment is an everyday phenomena in schools and universities. The problem is more implicit and silenced because of social and cultural taboos. Breaking this taboo and make the voice of this victimized group heard is an effort of researchers. Thus, this study aims to fill the gaps identified above and suggest possible solutions that might help to minimize the problem and help to create a conducive and girls' friendly learning atmosphere in higher institutions.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to assess the practices of sexual harassment against female students in higher institutions; the case of Ambo University. The study was guided by questions such as: How do female students perceive the experience of sexual harassment in their university? Who are students harassed by? And what are the impacts of sexual harassment on female students in the university?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Sexual harassment has become the burning issue of the day in educational institutions, particularly, in the universities, where students start to live a new way of life (the campus life) away from family advice, and coaching. In this new environment students' particularly female students are exposed to sexual harassment problem. Thus, the outcome of this study is expected to help in the first place students to make them aware and conscious about the problem; and

secondly, it may help the university to use the findings as input for policy formulation and formulating strategies to curb the problem at the university.

2. Research Method

The study was conducted using qualitative research method. As stated by Creswell (2007: 37), this approach enables the researcher to collect data in a natural setting, sensitive to the people and places under study. Added to that, qualitative research explores attitude, behavior and experience through multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observation and documents, rather than relying on a single data source (Dawson, 2007:15; Creswell, 2009:176). The rationale for selecting this method was that, sexual harassment is a subjective phenomenon. So, qualitative method of research was better to get in-depth responses from the participants. A case study is thus, appropriate for this study since it strives to portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation, to catch the close up reality and ‘thick description’ of participants’ lived the experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation (Colen, Manion and Morrison (2000:182). Besides this, case study is appropriate for detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007).

2.1 Study Site and its Background

Ambo University is selected as the site for this study. Ambo University (AU) is one of the oldest higher learning institutions in Ethiopia. It is found in the West Showa zone of the Oromia National Regional State, and is located about 110 km West of Addis Ababa. The current Ambo University was originally established in 1939, as an agricultural school. It was known with different names before it has assumed its present name. Among others, it was named, Ambo Agriculture and Forestry Secondary School in 1958, Ambo Institute of Agriculture in 1967, and Ambo Junior College of Agriculture in 1974. In 2003, it was affiliated to Jimma University and named Jimma University - Ambo College and in 2008, it became Ambo University College. Beginning from 2009, it has become a full fledged university and got its present name: Ambo University. Currently, the university has four campuses organized in five Colleges: (College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, College of Business and Economics, College of Natural and Computational Sciences, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and College of Medicine and Health Sciences) and three institutes: (Institute of Education and Behavioral Studies, Institute of Technology, and Institute of Cooperatives and Development Studies), and one school (School of Law). (Ambo University senate legislation,2013). The reason for selecting this institution is that, the researcher had the opportunity to witness students’ complaints regarding the problem first hand both as a faculty member and a gender focal person of the institute of education of the University. Moreover, to my knowledge the problem is unexplored in this particular university. Thus, it is appropriate to investigate the issue of sexual harassment at selected site.

2.2 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The target population of the study was all female students at Ambo University since; the study has tried to explore the experience of female students about sexual harassment at the university. The samples of the study were five female students that were selected for in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions (FGD with five participants and the other FGD consists seven participants). Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants of the study. The rationale to use this technique is to get information from those respondents who have understanding on the problem under the study (Creswell, 2009: 178). All respondents were undergraduate students who are a second year and above in their academic career. It was believed that these students have long time experiences in the university than first year students and as a result can provide adequate information on the problem under the study.

For this study three data gathering instruments: (in -depth interview, focus group discussion (FGD), and document analyses) were employed. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were designed in a semi-structured way, as to allow the participants the freedom to share their stories. The in-depth interview was conducted in one –to –one, with five female students that took about 30 to 40 minutes each. In-depth interview is important of gaining a detailed insight into research issue from perspective of the participants themselves. The other tool used in this study was focus group discussions (FGDs). Accordingly, two focus group discussions were conducted (one group consists 5 participants, and the other group consists 7 participants) with female students. The advantage of FGD is that it helps to gain a wide range of responses during one meeting and helps people to remember issues they might otherwise have forgotten (Colen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:288; Dawson, 2007:30). Since the sexual harassment is a sensitive issue, the interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with respondents were conducted by two of my female colleagues who are faculty members in the study site. Moreover, for secondary data the document analyses were secured from different literatures, the university clinic and the office of gender diversity and inclusive education directorate.

2.3 Validation and Reliability

Validity in qualitative inquiry has to do with being truthful. It refers to the bridge between a construct and the data (Neuman, 2007:120). In qualitative research, “validity does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research” (Creswell, 2009: 190). How qualitative researchers might check the accuracy of their findings, Creswell (2009:192-192) offered eight possible strategies from which a researcher could choose. Triangulation is one of those strategies. In this study I used triangulation strategy and thick descriptions to address validity concerns. According to Neuman, (2007:119) reliability in qualitative research refers to “the consistency and dependability of the research findings. To secure the reliability of the findings the transcripts should not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription (Creswell, 2009), furthermore, dependability will be obtained through triangulation as well as a detailed report on the processes followed in the study so that future researchers may repeat the work. Hence, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed and interpreted carefully to secure the reliability of the study.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research code of ethics requires that research should be based on informed consent (Flick, 2006). The rights, needs, values and desires of the respondents need to be respected by a researcher (Creswell, 2009:198). Accordingly, I articulated the objectives of the study, data collection devices and their consent in using the devices. It was agreed with respondents that at any time they can withdraw from the study and not to be recorded if they don’t want. As a result all respondents were not volunteered to be tape-recorded except a little discussion made with one FGD. Finally, the interviewees were given a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality and anonymity while reporting the findings.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

To conduct the study permission was granted by the university. The study was conducted among Ambo University female students from last week of October to Mid-November, 2015. Since, by its nature sexual harassment is sensitive, two female instructors of the university volunteered in conducting the interviews and the FGDs with female students. The interviews and the FGDs were conducted in Amharic (working language of the Federal government) to maximize understanding of students on the problem. All respondents did not agree to be recorded. As a result, the interviewers had to take detail notes during the interviews and FGDs. Immediately, after the completion of each interview and FGDs; I met with the interviewers and took detailed

notes raised in the interviews and in the FGDs before they are forgotten. In the process, the field notes were arranged under pre-codes (such as nature of harassment, forms of harassment, harassers, and consequence) which were based on basic questions for analyses.

2.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis involves collecting open - ended data, based on asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by respondents (Creswell, 2009:184). Once the interviews and focus group discussions were completed, the field notes were transcribed and translated into English language. Data obtained from the interviews and FGDs were prepared for analysis using Tesch's approach in (Creswell, 2007). The transcripts were read and re-read for understanding and, in the process, the transcripts were arranged under pre-codes (such as nature of harassment, forms of harassment, harassers, and consequence) which were based on basic questions. Finally, six themes (perception of female students about sexual harassment, forms of sexual harassment, harassers of female students, first year students more exposed to sexual harassment, sexual harassment as a silenced phenomenon and consequences of sexual harassment) were developed and the analyses were made as follows.

2.7 Limitation of the Study

The study was limited to female students at Ambo University, and did not include male students' view about the sexual harassment since, the objective of the study was to assess female student' experience on sexual harassment. The other limitation of the study is that the findings are not generalized for other Ethiopian higher institutions. Thus, future study needs to incorporate both male and female students and other universities in order to have holistic understanding on the problem.

3. Results

3.1 Perception of Female Students about Sexual Harassment

The analyses of data from interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) of female students show that sexual harassment is a chronic problem in higher institution. All of the interviewees believed that sexual harassment against female students are a serious problem in their university. For instance, Birtukan (pseudonym) 21 years old, who came from Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (SNNP) region, believed that sexual harassment against female students is a daily practice at the university. As she stated, sexual jokes, and unwelcome sexual comments are normal practices. Especially, during night time female students cannot move safely from library to dorm (for instance, being pulled out of road, being kissed by force, being touched on breast, and genital area and even being forced to have sex by male students) Robe, 19 years old, who came from Oromia, also asserted that harassment against female students is a day to day phenomenon at the university. As she stated the sexual harassment was started at lower education levels (primary and secondary), but worsened at higher institutions. According to Lensa, the 3rd year mechanical engineering student, the magnitude of sexual harassment is high. As she stated ... "Every night the case of harassment is a hot discussion in their dormitory, sometimes the victims that I heard make me shocked." All of the interviewed female students highlighted the high severity of the issue in their university. In the FGDs all participants agreed that almost all female students are the victim of at least one form of sexual harassment in their academic years of stay in the university. In focus group discussion some participants asserted the magnitude of sexual harassment as a medium, while the others put the magnitude as high. Those who argued as "high" claimed that it seems a medium level for us since we adapted it as our daily life. But, the problem was very serious when we were first year

students, and even now for new comers of female students to the university. The foregoing discussion revealed that the magnitude of sexual harassment at the university is high.

3.2 Female Students Faced Different Forms of Sexual Harassment

The data from interviews show that female students are harassed in different forms at university. As Birtukan and Roman both 3rd year students noted boys are harassing female students in different ways. For instance, they (boys) talk sexual jokes, sexual comments, and show sexual pictures, text sexual messages, pulled female students, kissed by force, and made forced sex. Similarly, Robe the 3rd year civil engineering student also stated that, female students are the victims of harassment from simple jokes to forced sex in and out of the campus. Robe has stated her experiences as; “when I was first year student someone whom I didn’t know kissed me by force in the library when the light was off...” Toltu, 20 years old, came from Oromia also gave her witness about her victim friend. She stated that a friend of her was raped by someone; later on she faced health problem and as a result she left the university. It was also confirmed by FGD that female students faced all forms of sexual harassment at the university. For instance, unwanted sexual comments that degrade females, laughed in group directing to female students, touched their breast, slapped and kicked them, show sexual pictures that embarrass them, when a female student is alone she is pulled and kissed by harassers. The above mentioned evidences show that any negative act towards female students is considered as harassment.

3.3 Female Students are harassed in and out of Campus by Individuals

The information gained from participants depicted that female students are harassed by campus individuals such as male students, teachers, administrative staff and outsiders or off campus individuals.

3.3.1 Male Students

All interviewed and FGD participants asserted that, male students were the most harassers of them in campus and out of the campus. For instance, Robe stated that male students as an individual and/or in group assaulting us on the road, in the dining hall, in library, at spaces and even in the classroom. In the FGDs discussion there are many situations (group assignments, class room, meal house, library, residence area and the like) that bring female and male students together than others. As a result of these connections, male students have an opportunity for harassing female students. All participants of FGD disclosed that male students harassed female students everywhere; mostly, in and around their residence building or dormitories , on the way to and from the library especially during night time . As one respondent stated “... it seems telling story but it is the girl who experienced the pain that knows more about the problem. From my experience of the three years of university life, I faced an attempt of rape from male students while I came back from library to my dormitory.” In the FGDs it also disclosed that female students were mostly harassed when they go to and return from the library and around their dormitory because their building or dormitories are not secured by fence. As they stated the seriousness of the problem is high since, during night time it is difficult to come out form the dorm without accompany of their friends.

3.3.2 Administrative Staff

The information obtained from both interviews and FGDs show that, female students were the victims of harassment by campus police, librarians, university clinic workers, students’ cafeteria or meal house workers, and custodians. The seriousness of the problem is stated by one of the respondents as “...to whom we talk? And who believe us...the problem is serious. I knew one student who was raped by a campus police ...he always forced her to have sex with him. Similarly, in FGDs it was highlighted that campus polices were the more serious harassers

followed by librarians in harassing female students. Most of the FGD participant asserted that they themselves and their friends were harassed by campus police.

3.3.3 Academic Staff

The data obtained from participants (interviewees and FGDs) show that, few academic staffs harassed female students through give and take fallacy. For instance, Robe has stated the situation as "...few teachers use their power for sexual favor ... they threaten female students with grade... if students don't comply with teacher's sexual desire they got "F" or incomplete. Participants of FGDs underlined that few male teachers exchange grade for sex. Moreover, these teachers link other teachers' examination paper to female students' prior to examination date as favor to have sex with them. However, one participant's of the FGD stated it in different way. According to her view students also harassed teachers. She describes the situation as "...in the past teachers gave low grade (not genuine grade) for female students and called them to their office to exchange grade for sex...but now days the situation is inversed. Those female students who got low grade in their performance went to teacher's office to get better grade by any means ... mostly by having sex for grade." These all aforementioned evidences show that harassment of female students by academic staff is more serious since, it is attached to power that affect the academic relationship between teachers and students and lessen self confidence of students.

3.3.4 Off Campus Individuals (outsiders)

All participants of the interviews and FGDs agreed that outsiders are also harassers of female students. According to the view of most interviewed, a gang or gangs block the road or follow them where they go. Intentionally they push them by their shoulder, touch their breast and assault them verbally. They snatch their mobile phone and ID cards as female students follow them. During night time they threaten them and ask for dating. Moreover, these individuals create relations with few "bajaj" (three-tire vehicle) drivers, and force and take female students where they rape them. According to FGDs what makes the situation of outsider harassers more complex is that they have brokers whom they call "delala" from the campus. These brokers (cafeteria workers, peers, librarians, campus police and very few teachers), facilitate when and where the innocent female students (without their awareness) are given over to harassers (their friends) or to wealthy individuals.

3.4 First Year Students more sexually Harassed

The analyses of data from respondents show that although all female students are the victim of sexual harassment at all education levels, but in case of university the problem is worst for first year female students. Toltu describes the problem as; "when we were first year students one of our friends was raped by a senior student and became pregnant, as a result she quitted form the university. Similarly, what happened to her Robe describes the situation as "...When I was a first year student, suddenly the light turned off in the library. Students were shouting here and there in the campus. When I went out from the library, someone whom I didn't know touched me and closed my mouth ... Now when I remember the situation I become nervous." The data obtained from FGD show that almost all female students particularly first year students are exposed to sexual harassment. The reasons stated were that most of the female students joining the university with anxiety and misinformation about higher education. These situations might create an opportunity for senior male students to have high attachments with female students in fashion of having similar religion, similar language and similar geographic area and by providing materials such as handouts, exercise books and other materials to fulfill their sexual desire through any form of sexual harassment. The other reason raised by FGD was that the background from which female students came was different from the new context. It means that most female

students came from rural areas and they are new for the environment and easily cheated by harassers.

i) Sexual Harassment is a Silenced Phenomenon

It was evidenced from respondents that very rare incidents of harassment were reported. One of the interviewed stated the situation as “for whom could we report? All know the problem.” Another respondent saying that “even though we report we are blamed too. In the FGDs participants agreed that it was difficult to report harasser for different reasons. One of the reasons they raised was fear of backfire of harassers or their friends. This is because most harassers threaten them not to tell the incident for any one. The other reason is fear of power of harassers. Some harassers (administrative staff and academic staff) use their position power to attack them. Moreover, the other reason was lack of witness. The last but not the least reason is lack of confidence of being ashamed of, not to be identified as sexually harassed by others for the fear of future life. These all aforementioned reasons may emanate from lack of awareness, lack of support, and encouragement and lack of system coordination at the university, which seems that the issue of sexual harassment is only the responsibility of the office of gender diversity and inclusive education directorate.

ii) Consequences of Sexual Harassment

It is evidenced from participants that sexual harassment against female students causes health, psychological and educational problems. Concerning the health problem; Birtukan gave her witness about her victim friend. She stated the situation as “... A friend of mine was raped by someone whom she doesn’t know...as the result she was exposed to health problem and dropped out from the university.” Similarly, Roman has stated that, many female students left on half way (without completion of their education) as the result of sexual harassment. She has witnessed that her friend was raped by a male student...and she became pregnant, and as a result she left the university. Lensa, the 3rd year student also witnessed what happened to a student with whom she shared dormitory, while she was a first year student. She stated the situation as “... after living together for three months, her behavior changed, she was unhappy, when we go to the library she stayed in the dorm, when we came back to dorm ... we found her in her bed...one day I asked her why she stayed in the dorm while others go to the library? At the beginning she didn’t volunteer to tell me the reason, but later on she told me that as someone raped her ...and she became pregnant....finally, she left the university.” Alike, FGDs participants agreed that those harassed students suffered from health problem such as sexual transmitted disease, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, HIV/ ADIS, academic problems such as low performance, academic failure, and dropout and psychological problems such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and an attempt of suicide. Similarly, the data obtained from Ambo University clinic verified the information gained from the interviews and FGDs. Accordingly, the data depicted that in the past three academic years (2013-2015) from the total of, 1252 female students who came voluntarily to the clinic for human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) examination, 768 (61%) of them were positive HCG or pregnant. Similarly, the data obtained from the clinic shows that in every quarterly report, from the total female students who came to the clinic, about 10% to 15% were exposed to sexually transmitted diseases. The finding is consistent with World Health Organization (WHO 2012); harassed females faced health, and behavioral problems. Although, the data gained from the clinic may show the health problem of female students as the result of sexual intercourse and not to be concluded as the result of sexual harassment. However, it might be an indicator of the problem in the study site.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Discussion

Universities are expected to be safe working environments for students, faculty staffs, and administrative staffs and for the university community as a whole in order to achieve their goals. However, creating conducive environment for teaching and learning activities, sexual harassment is one of the challenging problems in educational institutions such as universities. A number of studies that were conducted in developed and developing countries (Hill and Silva, 2005; Bizu, et al., 2009; Hill and Kearn, 2011 and Okorie, 2014), show that sexual harassment appears to be a serious problem at all levels of education and across all nations. Like the case in other countries; in Ethiopian schools and universities sexual harassment against female students is high (Yeshimebrat, Alemayehu and Firew, 2013; Almaz, et al, 2015 and Ejeta, 2015). The result of this study also revealed that sexual harassment against female students is a serious problem at the university. It was found that sexual harassment against female students is a wide spread phenomenon and a day to day practices in Ambo University. The study also found out that almost majority of the female students were victims of sexual harassment in their study years of the university. The finding of this study was confirmed with the previous studies. For instance, nearly two-thirds (62%) of college campus of U.S. female students (Hill and Silva, 2005), 67% of female students at Czech University in Czech Republic (Vohlídalová, 2011), and 71.8 % of female students at Zambia university (Menon, et al, 2009) experienced some form of sexual harassment during their college education. In another study for 80% of women in Nigerian higher institutions, sexual harassment is the greatest challenge in their attempt to successfully complete their academic goals (Okorie, 2014). These all aforementioned evidences show that the prevalence of sexual harassments against female students were more serious problem across all nations of educational institutions including Ethiopia.

Another finding of this study was that, female students faced all forms of sexual harassment in their university education. The study shows that all participants of the study agreed that harassers exhibit all forms of harassment against female students. The types of sexual harassment identified in the study were unwanted sexual comments, sexual jokes, laughing at female students, touching female students in unwelcome way, show sexual pictures, sending sexual text, pulling, kissing, forced sex and having sex for exchange of settlements such as good grade and other benefits. In many literatures these types of harassments can be categorized in to four forms of harassments such as verbal, non-verbal, physical and quid pro quo (a gift or advantage that is given to someone in return for something that they have done) harassment; (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 2003; ILO, 2005; and Çela, 2015). The results of the study show that the former three types of harassments were mostly practiced by male students and other harassers but the fourth type quid pro quo (this for that) was practiced by teachers and outsiders in the study site.

The study found that sexual harassment against female students is experienced by in campus individuals (male students, administrative staff, and academic staff) and outsiders or off campus individuals. It was found out that male students are the most harassers of female students. This finding was consistence with the findings of (Kayuni, 2009) at the University of Malawi's Chancellor College and (Almaz, et al, 2015) at Jimma University which shows that the high occurrence of sexual harassment was male student to female student. The reasons might be that male students have an opportunity to have contacts with female students than other harassers and this may push them for sexual violence. The other case might be the male students being physically strong than female students, that mean the existence of physical power distance between male and female students.

The study disclosed that female students are harassed by administrative staff (campus police, librarians, and other employees) but the most serious of these groups is the campus police. The case might be first the frequent contact between campus police and students, and the other reason might be the position power they hold, that means they threaten students and the last reason might be lack of ethics and accountability.

The other harassers identified by the study were academic staffs. The study disclosed that few teachers harassed female students. According to Hill and Silva (2005) sexual harassment from higher-status individuals (faculty and administrators) should be worst than peer harassment, because, it fosters learned helplessness. However, Huerta, et.al (2006) argued that no matter what the status of the harasser is (hierarchically or laterally); it is equally harmful to students' mental health. Both arguments are essentially seeing harassment as harmful practice that impedes the wellbeing of the harassed group.

In this study it was found that outsiders (off-campus) individuals were also other harassers of female students. What makes the situation more serious is that these outsiders have "delala" or brokers in the campus who facilitate and give over innocent female students for these harassers. These outsider harassers impede the safety and free movement of female students' in and out of their campus.

The study disclosed that although all female students are the victims to sexual harassment at all education levels but, first year students are more exposed to sexual harassment than senior students at the study site. The reasons might be first year students are new comers to a new environment with anxiety and misunderstanding about the higher education. As a result of these female students can be easily cheated by senior students and other harassers.

The study also depicted that harassed female students silenced the problem. They do not report harassers for different reasons, like fear of harassers' position, backfire of harassers and lack of support and security from the university. This finding was consistence with the finding of (Indi, 1994) about 93% of students in university of Zimbabwe would not report sexual harassment to any authority for fear of victimization or because they do not believe that the present structures are set to protect them.

The negative impacts of sexual harassment against female students were many. According to this study many harassed female students faced health problems such as sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies, sometimes leading to unsafe abortions; psychological problems such as lack of self confidence and anxiety; and educational problems such as drop out, withdrawal and low performance in their learning. This finding was consistence with the finding of Huerta, et al (2006), sexual harassment in college are associated with increased psychological distress, and performance decline; physical problems such as too much bleeding, abortion, infection of the pelvic and other problems (Mekonnen and Asresash,2007).

4.2 Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to assess the practices of sexual harassment against female students at higher institutions particularly the case of Ambo University. It was evidenced that sexual harassment is practiced at all layers of education levels, but the problem is more serious at higher institutions. Female students faced various forms of sexual harassment , ranging from simple unwanted sexual comments to forced sex in their education career by different harassers- male students, academic staff, and outsiders. As a result of these victims, female students are exposed to physical health problems, psychological problems and less performance in their education and drop out from the university.

The study found that the victimized female students were silenced about the problem because of fear of harassers' revenge and lack of confidence on the action taken against offenders. This situation seems aggravating the problem in the university. It is obvious that women account more than half of the society in any nation including Ethiopia. Unless the human rights of this group of society is secured and protected from harmful practices such as sexual harassment, it is difficult to achieve the objectives set for MDGs that the country struggling to implement. Moreover, now a day's Ethiopia gave due attention for the expansion of existing universities and establishing new ones in the country. As a result, the number of female students in higher institutions will increase significantly than ever. So that the government at all levels, and the universities in particular have to work to create safety learning environment for all students particularly for female students.

5. Recommendations

It is believed that educations are a means to alleviate poverty and enhance growth and development of nations. Thus, it is the responsibility of the educational institutions, and the government at all levels, and the society in general to create conducive learning climate for all students particularly for female students. In higher education proclamation No. 650/2009 the government of Ethiopia gave due attention to the rights of student in higher institutions. Under article 37, sub article 1(b), it was stated that the students have the right to "enjoy the freedom to learn with appropriate opportunities and conditions in classrooms, campuses and in the larger community." Under article 37, sub article 1(e), it was stated that students have the right to "receive protection from any form of discrimination or harassment." These sub- articles emphasize on the creation of safety learning environment, and protecting students from any harmful practices including harassment. Accordingly, to create conducive learning environment and to protect female students from any kind of harassment including sexual harassment I proposed the following recommendations.

1. Sexual harassment is a societal problem and harassment against female students is occurring from within and off the campus. Thus, the university should work with different government sectors found in the area (female and youth affairs, police office, town administration, Justice, security affairs, education, political leaders, different religious leaders and non-governmental organizations) and with the larger community in general in creating awareness on the problem and making sure that legal and corrective actions are taken on harassers.
2. The students and the staffs have less understanding on anti- sexual harassment guide line that was developed by the university; moreover, the guide line is not available in both hard copy and soft copy for the university community. Thus, the university should seriously work on awareness creation by giving trainings on sexual harassment for students and its employees particularly for first year students in order to create a safe teaching –learning environment.
3. It was found out that sexual harassment is mostly practiced during the night time around females' dormitory and on ways to library. Thus, to minimize the incident the university should arrange a 24 hours study room with available copies of material around their dormitories in all campuses. Moreover, the university should separate females' dormitories from other buildings by using fence and the gate should be kept by female guards.
4. The university should work on assertiveness training for female students on their rights and how to deal with sexual harassments. To break the silence of reporting sexual violence, and to create awareness on the problem, there should be a panel discussions on sexual harassment issue among different groups such as female students, gender diversity and inclusive education directorate, student affairs, counselors, student council and the like in order to encourage the victims to breath out their problem without fear.
5. The university should develop different strategies and clearly defined structure that enable to curb sexual harassment Problem. Moreover, there should be special grievance procedures through which the voice of victims shall be heard by the university officials.

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