

Exploring Institutional Measures of mitigating Sexual Harassment Cases by Male Teachers: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Luapula Province

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Abstract: Purpose: This paper seeks to present the study which was conducted to explore the institutional measures of mitigating sexual harassment cases by male teachers in Luapula province. The study was undertaken in the 5 randomly selected secondary schools across the province.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used qualitative paradigm in which descriptive survey design was ideal. The descriptive design was chosen in order to come up with more comprehensive, deeper insights from respondents so that a better understanding of the phenomenon under study is enhanced. The study was based on questionnaire and interview guide. Questionnaires were administered to 5 Head teachers, 5 Guidance and counseling teachers and 15 teachers while interview guide was used to collect data from 15 pupils.

Findings: The study revealed that, sexual harassment is a serious problem and its mitigation needs not only the attention of the head teacher but the collective effort with the teachers, pupils, stake holders and other interested parties who are involved in the provision of education.

Limitations of the study: The findings of the study focused on the role of the institutions in mitigating sexual harassment of female pupils by male teachers. The findings therefore, cannot be generalized to the male pupils and female teachers because this research only endeavored to address the issue that has raised serious concerns and has drawn the attention of the government, parents, stakeholders, organizations, civil societies and the world at large.

Practical implication: The practical implication is that if sexual harassment in schools is not mitigated, it can lead to psychological trauma in children who are subjected to it, it can also cause risk of death, poor physical and mental health, Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) infection, early pregnancy, education problems, loneliness, vagrancy and poor parenting skills later in life. The institutions therefore, should fight hard and mitigate it.

Originality/value: The study supports previous studies which identified that sexual harassment is a serious social problem and advocated for its mitigation. However this paper highlights the divergence views of the respondents on the mitigation of sexual harassment, thereby highlighting on the need to establish policies, breaking the silence in schools and communities and instituting reporting laws on sexual harassment.

Key words: Sexual harassment, Mitigation, Institution, Deliberate policy.

Paper type: Research paper

I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment is the act of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical contact of sexual nature such as seducing or touching in a way that may lead to sexual act (Menon, Glazebrook, Campain and Ngoma, 2007; Daka, Phiri, Chipindi and Nachimwenda, 2021). The study revealed that sexual harassment is a serious social problem because it affects the society and individual's physical, cognitive, interpersonal and emotional function and can also lead to school dropout. According to Whitefield and Charles (2010), sexual harassment is one of the typical causes and dangers of psychological trauma and children who are subjected to it are at a risk of death, poor physical and mental health, Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) infection, education problems, loneliness, vagrancy and poor parenting skills later in life. Sexual harassment can make children lose interest in education because they may dislike some subjects taught by the very teachers who perpetrate it and it can also make them live in perpetual fear of their persecutors. The United Nations Secretary General's report (2006) revealed that, sexual harassment in schools can lead to lack of motivation for academic achievement. Children who are harassed sexually usually find themselves distracted, fearful, unmotivated and unable to concentrate on their studies or to perform well in class. The World Health Organization (WHO)'s report (2002) also revealed that sexual harassment is an obstacle to education and it negatively affects girls' personal development and ability to contribute to the economic growth of the community and the nation. WHO (2005) and Kawonga, Mbozi and Daka (2021) also noted that, studies have suggested that sexual harassment is common throughout the world, to varying degrees by teachers themselves as well as by students, and that it may be particularly common and extreme in places where other forms of school violence are also prevalent.

Sexual harassment is a very secretive act and some victims can keep it to themselves for the rest of their lives if they are not bold enough to open up and tell someone about it. There are cases of sexual harassment taking place in schools and the teachers harassing pupils sexually are many and one would wonder what is really happening in schools. The Teaching

Service Commission (TSC) chairperson said that 80 percent of male teachers in Zambia have involved themselves in sexual misconduct with female pupils and many of these cases have not been reported in some areas especially Luapula and Central provinces (Zambia Daily Mail; Feb 21, 2018). TSC also reviewed that over 1 000 teachers had been reported at the commission in the years 2009 – 2011 for sexually harassing female pupils in schools, out of this number only eight (8) teachers had been dismissed country wide (TSC report, 2012). The study also revealed that, many cases of sexual harassment are not reported and some are swept under the carpet, especially in situations where the perpetrator is related to the victim or where the parents or guardians of the victim negotiate for compensation with the perpetrator. In many situations, the teachers who are found in sexual harassment cases are just transferred to other schools and cases are closed.

Objectives: To explore the measures the institutions put in place to mitigate sexual harassment cases; to establish the challenges that institutions face in mitigating sexual harassment and to examine the institutional strategies of mitigating sexual harassment cases.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are incidents of sexual harassment in schools which include a range of aggressive behavior and misuse of authority, rape and various forms of sexual assault, verbal and bribing female pupils with money or the promise of better grades just to have a way to sexual favors. The following are some of the cases which happened globally, regionally and locally.

Global: In the United States of America (USA), a high school volleyball coach and algebra teacher in Oklabona was arrested and convicted for sexual harassment in January, 2020 while a 33 year old special education teacher in Chicago was also convicted in February, 2020 for having carnal knowledge of an eighth grader. In another development, the oldest national school for the deaf is facing dozens of sexual harassment allegations related to its former students who said they suffered at the hands of the school staff for more than three decades (Deep Knowledge Daily, 2020).

In Ireland, a 23 year old teacher was jailed for one year for defiling a 16 year old pupil of the same school (The Irish Times: September 11, 2020) and in London, the state minister of primary education revealed at a teachers' conference at St Lawrence London College in Maya that there are teachers who are cited in cases of sexual harassment. The minister further warned that those who would be found wanting would have their services terminated by the Ministry of Education and Sports (Nile Post: December 8, 2019).

Regional: In Uganda, a research funded by World Bank revealed that about four percent (4%) of the upper primary school girls were sexually harassed by their teachers, this implied that about 43000 girls in primary 5 to primary 7

roughly between the age of 10 and 14 were sexually harassed by the very people who are meant to groom them into upright citizens while at Nyamwegabira Primary school, a head teacher reportedly defiled and impregnated a 15 year old pupil (New vision: June 7, 2011). Another 29 year old teacher of Springfield International school in Kambiri, Wakiso District was convicted for defiling a girl aged 8 of the same school on June 21st (All Africa: July 16, 2019) and a 31 year old male teacher of Obutu primary school in Kole District in Alito sub-country was arrested for sexually harassing a 17 year old pupil of the same school (Daily Monitor: November 29, 2019).

In Kenya, a 15 year old form one pupil of Ndutumi Boarding School in Mahuro, Murang'country was defiled by a male teacher when she went to report to the same teacher that she was sexually harassed by the school's assistant head teacher (Face of Malawi: October 24, 2019) while a male teacher of Iluyva secondary school in Machakos was arrested for defiling a form II girl (Standard media: January 11, 2020).

Local: In Zambia, the situation is just the same as what is prevailing in other countries, globally and regionally, and the cases of sexual harassment are rampant in nearly all the provinces (Chomba, 2011). In Luapula Province, a 37 year old teacher of Kalima Primary school in Nchelenge District was arrested for defiling a 14 year old grade 8 pupil while in another development, a 28 year old teacher of Nchelenge secondary school was arrested for defiling and impregnating a 15 year old school girl (Zambia Reports: June 24, 2019).

In Lusaka Province, a 62 year old retired teacher defiled two grade 3 pupils aged 9 and 10 of Mutendere township after threatening them that they would die in the sleep if they told anyone about the incident (Daily Nation: January 18, 2019), and a head teacher at a named school in Mtendere township defiled a 7 year old girl in his office (Zambia Daily Mail: December 3, 2015).

In Muchinga Province, a 14 year old girl of Muomba Primary school in Chinsali District was defiled by her teacher on June 4, 2019 (Lusaka Sun: June 10, 2019). The head teachers should be in the first line of defense against sexual harassment in schools and their role in this aspect cannot be over emphasized. They are the ones who should ensure that the rules and regulations of the code of conduct are adhered to by all teachers. The research therefore, endeavored to explore the institutional measures of mitigating sexual harassment cases in schools.

The role of institutions in mitigating sexual harassment cases: The literature review presented the roles which institutions can play in mitigating sexual harassment in schools.

Goldman (2005) and Bomber, Daka and Mphande (2020) asserts that schools should be the first line of defense against sexual harassment. The school manager should ensure that, schools like other organizations should have a deliberate policy to limit one-on-one interaction between learners and staff (United States Department of Health and Human

Sciences, 2007). The school manager should ensure that school aged children are taught about sexual harassment using school based programs so that pupils can be aware and know how to protect themselves from it (Zwi, O'Brien, Tait, Wheeler, Williams, and Woolfenden, 2007). The school manager has a role to ensure that every employee of the school is informed about the identification and prevention of sexual harassment cases (Mitchel, 2010).

Challenges of institutions in mitigating sexual harassment cases: The literature review presented a number of challenges which institutions face in mitigating of sexual harassment.

The school institutions face challenges in mitigating sexual harassment cases. According to Matakala (2012), Baseline survey on the experiences of sexual violence among women and girls conducted in Kasoro District, Uganda (2009) reviewed that, there is a tendency by parents or guardians of seeing girls as a source of wealth and in the case of sexual harassment, parents see this as an opportunity of getting money from the suspected harasser. Nansasi (2010) noted that failure by the victims or their relatives to report cases to the concerned parties is a challenge in handling sexual harassment cases. Women and Law in Southern Africa – Zambia (WLSA) (2012) noted that girls who experience sexual violence and harassment at school face multiple barriers to obtaining redress; such as absence of clear policies and procedures to responding to defilement cases.

Strategies of mitigating sexual harassment cases in schools: The literature review presented some of the strategies which institutions can use for mitigating sexual harassment.

Gwirayi (2013) noted that children need to be empowered with information about how to protect themselves from defilement. Michel (2010), Daka, Chipindi, Phiri, Mulenga, Mvula and Chirwa (2021) and Brown (2005) asserted that, school supervisors and some heads need to be clear that any sexual contact with a learner regardless of age, is ground for dismissal even if it occurs off school grounds. Holmes (2007) and Daka, Hamatanga, Mumba, Kaoma, and Chikopela (2021). noted that, setting clear guidelines on children's internet and video usage is another step teachers need to take in prevention of sexual harassment cases. Spitalli (2012: 26) observed that 'teachers should develop positive teacher-learner relationship yet maintaining a professional distance. Teachers should not regard learners as equals or place them on an adult level emotionally because this can lead to the development of a more personal, rather than professional learner-teacher relationship.' The National Security for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2013) observed that, members of staff should receive safeguarding training to ensure that they have concerns especially when a child discloses sexual harassment incidents to them. Mathews (2011) noted that, research has shown that adequate training for teachers in management of sexual harassment is required so that teachers can be empowered with adequate knowledge about how to carry their responsibility in protection of children.

III. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive design survey was used to conduct the study. Data was collected through the structured questionnaires which were distributed to the head teachers, Guidance and counseling teachers and teachers while pupils were interviewed using the interview guide. The total sample was 40 and the distribution was 5 Head teachers, 5 Guidance and counseling teachers who were selected using purposive sampling, then 15 teachers and 15 pupils (thus; 3 teachers and 3 pupils from each of the 5 selected secondary schools) were selected using random sampling. The data was also analyzed qualitatively and thematically.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings revealed that institutions have a role to play in the fight against sexual harassment and this can be done by providing guidance and give direction to teachers so that they work in accordance with the provisions of the law as indicated in the code of ethics and general orders, which is seemingly lacking in some schools. The findings also revealed a number of challenges which institutions face in mitigating sexual harassment such as; how to change the mindset of the community about the girl child and the importance of protecting them from sexual harassment, how to break the silence on issues of sexual harassment in communities and how to sensitize the people about the importance of reporting cases to the authority. The findings further revealed that the challenges which institutions face in mitigating sexual harassment can be overcome by instituting the strategies such as breaking the silence, orienting the new teachers, pupils and the community, involving stakeholders in mitigating sexual cases and enhancing stern measures on the erring teachers.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings suggested that Head teachers have to ensure that teachers are guided on how to relate with pupils by setting professional distance and to orient new teachers on how to conduct themselves, and to ensure that teachers work in accordance with the provisions of the law. Head teachers should therefore, ensure that schools are sexual harassment free and this can be attained by dealing with any information leading to sexual harassment accordingly, whether done or not done. Guidance teachers should guide and give information to the pupils on how they should seek redress without intimidation and where they should report cases. Teachers should openly discuss the implications of sexual harassment with colleagues and should not fear any alienation when reporting cases and all should know the fate which comes with sexual harassment. Everyone should uphold the notion that, stopping sexual harassment is everyone's responsibility (Phiri, Musonda and Daka, 2020).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that sexual harassment is a serious social problem which needs not only the attention of head teachers

but many stake holders play in the provision of education. The study also established that despite the attitude of the society and culture, it is possible that sexual harassment can be fought in schools through the concerted effort of all the people concerned, especially the head teaches, community leaders and many other civic organizations. The study also made the following recommendations; Ministry of General Education should design and implement guidelines for schools to effectively and expeditiously deal with sexual harassment cases and institute disciplinary action to erring teachers, to come up with rigorous awareness campaigns on sexual harassment in schools in order to help pupils to understand its effect. The schools should also come up with deliberate policies to mitigate sexual harassment cases.

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