GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG NIGERIAN BANKS’ EMPLOYEES

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Abstract- Banks in Nigeria need to understand the perceptual difference in both male and female employees to better develop adequate policy on sexual harassment. This study investigated the perceptual differences on sexual harassment among male and female bank employees in two commercial cities (Kano and Lagos) of Nigeria. Two hundred and seventy five employees (149 males, 126 females) were conveniently sampled for this study. A survey design with a questionnaire adapted from Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) comprises of three dimension scales of sexual harassment was used. The hypotheses were tested with independent samples t-test. The results indicated no perceptual differences in labelling sexual harassment clues between male and female bank employees in Nigeria. Thus, the study recommends that bank managers should support and establish the tone for sexual harassment-free workplace.

Keywords- Gender Harassment, Sexual Coercion, Unwanted Sexual Attention, Workplace.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment has been identified in the behavioural literature as one of the serious interpersonal workplace deviance behaviour (Appelbaum, et al., 2007). It has cost organisations millions of dollars resulting from health injury and court cases damages. Studies have shown the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in Nigerian Organisations (Adenuga & Ilupeju, 2012; Hourel, 2007; Ladebo, 2003; Ogechukwu, 2013; Taiwo et al., 2014; Yusuf, 2008) which have negative effects on the job outcomes of both males and females. Sexual harassment is one of the grey areas within the Federal law of Nigeria. There is no Federal law in Nigeria that has explicitly penalises sexual harassment at work and no single case of sexual harassment has been known to come before the Nigerian courts (Hersch, 2015; Ladebo, 2003). In Nigeria, organisations and members view sexual harassment as an employer-employee problem, which should be resolved between the parties concerned (Ladebo, 2003). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the management to provide adequate sexual harassment policy.

This responsibility requires that managers must shift from the philosophy of treating all employees the same to recognizing perceptual differences and responding to those differences; this is necessary in order to ensure employee retention and achieve greater productivity (Robbins & Judge 2007). Individuals have differing views on how they organize and interpret their sensory impression to activities within their environment; and can result in differences in meaning of sexual harassment issues in the workplace. An individual perception and range of experience may generate ambiguity within the boundaries of sexual harassment. Hence, the importance of adequate management of ethical behaviour in the workplace, therefore, it is the responsibility of organisations to offer a harassment free environment for their employees and to know when and where it exists in the organization and eliminate it as soon as possible (Gutek, 1993; Nauman & Abbasi, 2014; Nwaeke, 2015).

Oluade (2001) affirmed that a sector of the Nigerian economy with a high prevalence of sexual harassment is the banking sector. The rising complaints of abuse and sexual harassment in the Nigerian banking industry traceable to the emergence of the new generation bankshave continued to cause concern about questionable labour practices thriving in the sector due to the glut in the labour market (Bangudu, 2009). Banks employees’ attempt to meet the goals and objectives of the bank goes through a lot of stress and challenges (Alouma & Atadiose, 2014). Similarly, bank managers and their directors mandate staff members to attract a certain amount of deposits which put pressure on staff and exposed them to different forms of sexual harassment (Nigerian Best Forum, 2013). A lot of female staff have been sexually assaulted, raped and killed in the bid to achieve the targets, and most have lost their jobs because of the difficulty in achieving such targets (Ogechukwu, 2013). Thus, most victims of sexual harassment in Nigeria are often scared to report due to cultural and customary practices (Fapohunda, 2014).

Prevalence of sexual harassment in organisations has adverse effects on the victims, the organisations as well as the society (Ganu & Boateng, 2013; Hersch, 2015; Nauman & Abbasi, 2014). Harassing behaviours in organisations may result in loss of existing and potential customers, damage to the company’s public image (Icenogle et al., 2002); increased organizational cost which includes legal cost and medical cost, increased employee turnover as well as a reduction in employee productivity (Hersch, 2015).
Sexual harassment can create offensive, hostile and intimidating work environment which can interfere with job performance and job success (Akanmu, 2009; Dougherty et al., 1996). Similarly, Ilesanmi (2012) asserted that sexual harassment weakens the dignity of both the victim and the perpetrator, and can act as a menace to occupational experience and welfare of employees especially women in the workplace.

Hence, the issue of sexual harassment is a great test for effective human resource management and management of unethical behaviours of the banking profession in Nigeria. The moral and psychological hazards for staff are worrisome. Management of banks in Nigeria needs to develop affirmative action on sexual harassment policy and procedures. Thus, it is pertinent to examine how employees’ perceived sexual harassment in the Nigerian banking industry in order to develop effective policy on the menace. It is hoped that the findings would provide a useful framework for bank managers on sexual harassment policy and prevention of unethical practices. Most importantly, this study can enhance proper training programme for employees on the cues that are frequently used to establish evidence in hostile working environment cases. Therefore, this study aimed at examining the perceptual difference of male and female employees on sexual harassment issues in Nigerian banks. Thus, the following assumptions guide this study:

\[ H1: \] There is no significant difference between male and female employees’ perception of gender harassment.

\[ H2: \] There is no significant difference between male and female employees’ perception of sexual coercion.

\[ H3: \] There is no significant difference between male and female employees’ perception of unwanted sexual attention.

II. SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

The Chattered Institutes of Bankers of Nigeria (2014) described sexual harassment to include, but not limited to situations where an employee uses or attempts to use his/her position to seek/obtain sexual gratification from another who may succumb in fear or adverse consequences on his/her employment/business. However, the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides a broad definition of sexual harassment as; unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of reasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment” (ECC, 2006). Hence, York (1989) perceived sexual harassment in the workplace as an important topic for research which is purely not an objective phenomenon but based on individual perception of another behaviour and may be affected by a number of factors that make up of a structural context.

MacKinnon (1979) distinguished between two categories of Sexual Harassment; quid- pro-quo harassment where sexual cooperation is tied to job-related threats or employment benefits, and hostile environment harassment, which refers to unwanted and offensive sex related verbal or physical conduct, without job outcomes being related to it. Till (1980) content analysed sexual harassment as gender harassment, seductive behaviour, sexual bribery, sexual coercion and sexual assault. Likewise, the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) developed by Fitzgerald et al. (1988) identified three psychological dimensions of sexual harassment: sexual coercion, gender harassment, and unwanted sexual attention.

Gender harassment involves behaviours that generally result in conveying hostile and degrading attitudes about women such as by gender-based hazing. Gender harassment is similar to sex-based harassment described by Berdahl (2007) as behaviour that are derogates or humiliates an individual based on his/her sex. Sexual harassment is primarily targeted at women who step out-of-place by having characteristics considered more desirable for men (Berdahl 2007). It occurs to illustrate to women they are not wanted in a certain workplace and they are not valued as members of particular work groups (O’Hare &O’Donohue, 1998). Hostile environment harassment occurs when sexual behaviours have the purpose or effect of unreasonably (Bell et al., 2002).

Sexual coercion involves bribery or threats (either explicit or implied) for sexual cooperation. Sexual coercion as observed by Gutek (1993) is a relationship in which one party is in a position to appraise the work or influence the career of the other and may constitute sexual harassment when that relationship gives undue access, create a hostile and offensive environment for others. Sexual harassment in some organisations is a contractual term either explicitly or implicitly where by job, promotion, or access to training opportunities or other benefits are granted (Sabitha 2008). The coercive nature of quid pro quo harassment requires that the harasser has some power over the target, thus most of such harassment is perpetrated by managers or supervisors. Unwanted sexual attention consists of behaviours that
are more widely recognized as harassing such as repeated attempts to establish a romantic relationship after refusal; unwanted touching; and sexual imposition. Unwanted sexual attention takes place when an individual presumes the existence of an intimate relationship which does not exist (Booker 1998). These are uninvited, unwanted sexual attention (pressure for sexual favours, deliberate touching, and pressure for dates), an unwanted sexual attention is just that sexual attention that is unwanted and un reciprocated by the recipient.

Tangri, et al. (1992) proposed three explanatory models of sexual harassment: natural/biological model, organisational model and socio-cultural model. However, the organisational model is more influential in explaining the nature, frequency and the most useful model for understanding sexual harassment in the workplace (Kayuni, 2009; Paludi, et al., 1991). The organisational model stated that sexual harassment in the workplace results from opportunities presented by relations of power and authority, which derive from the hierarchical structure of organisations. Kayuni (2009) described power as the capacity of an individual, group or organisation to influence others, requires the one being influenced to perceive his/her dependency on the one holding the power. Workplace structures are defined by asymmetric relations between supervisors and subordinates, people can use the power vested by their position to extort sexual gratification from their subordinates (Paludi et al., 1991).

Gender, is the demographic variable that most consistently predicts differences in perception of sexual harassment (Sorenso, et al., 1998). Researches on how male/female perceives sexual harassment have shown mixed results. There are ample evidences that suggested gender differences on sexual harassment (Abe, 2012; Ekoré, 2012; Fielder & Blanco, 2006; Icenogle, Eagle, Ahmad & Flanks, 2002; Konrad & Gutek, 1986; Nora, et al., 2002; Rotundo, Nguyen & Sackett, 2001; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Stratton, et al., 2005; Williams et al. 1997) on the other hand, evidence has shown male and female do not differ significantly on sexual harassment (Blakely et al. 1995; Keyton& Rhodes, 1999; Merkin, 2008; Webster, 2002). A meta-analysis study suggests that women are more likely than men to define a broader range of behaviours as harassing and it depends on other features of the situation such as belief and values (Rotundo, Nguyen & Sackett, 2001). Also, a three-country survey (Fielder & Blanco, 2006) revealed gender differences in the perceptions of sexual harassment. However, when the sample was broken down by countries, it was found that while there were significant differences in the perceptions of men and women in Mexico, there was no significant difference in the perceptions of men and women from the United States or Jamaica. Likewise, As a survey (Adeyemi, 1993) conducted in Nigerian universities revealed that male students perceived sexual harassment differently from female students but male and female lecturers are not different in their general perception, causes, effects of and possible solutions to sexual harassment in universities. As identified by Cochran (2009) and Merkin (2008), sexual harassment extends beyond individual nations to include cross cultural workgroups and whole multicultural organisations.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology
A cross-sectional design, convenience sampling of full time employees of 14 Nigerian deposit money banks deposit money banks listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange was used for this study. Two (2) commercial cities (Kano and Lagos) in Nigeria were chosen. Three hundred (300) bank employees representing 75% of the sample were selected for Lagos and one hundred (100) employees representing 25% of the sample were selected for Kano. The sample size for each bank is derived by the use of Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS). A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. The data collection was between July and September, 2013. Out of the 400 copies questionnaire distributed, 275 respondents properly filled and returned, representing a response rate of 69%.

3.2 Data
The questionnaire used for the study is adapted from Fitzgerald et al. (1995) model on sexual harassment using range of options 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to identify perception of bank employees on gender harassment, sexual coercion and unwanted attention. The questionnaire comprises of 5 items on gender harassment (e.g. Told suggestive stories or offensive jokes) and 5 items on sexual coercion (e.g. made you afraid of poor treatment if you didn’t cooperate) and 7 items on unwanted sexual coercion (e.g. continue to ask for dates, drinks, dinner even though you said “NO”). The reliability analysis of the constructs were determined to ensure internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Cronbach alpha results show high reliability of .957, .941 and .952 for gender harassment, sexual coercion and unwanted attention scales respectively.

The data was analysed using independent sample t-test with the aid of Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics
The participants consist largely of male employees with different job tenure. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of respondents.
4.2 Empirical Results and Interpretations
Table 2 presents the mean incidence and standard deviation of gender harassment, sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention for both male and female. Also on Table 2 is the summary of the t-test results. Establishing difference between male and female perception of gender harassment, the results show that there is no significant difference in scores for male (M = 42.94, SD = 21.03) and female (M = 38.34, SD = 19.125); t-value t(275) = 1.9 and significance difference (2 tailed value) is 0.60. Therefore, from the t-test finding, hypothesis one was supported.

Likewise, the difference between male and female perception of sexual coercion, the results show that there is no significant difference in scores for male (M = 37.07, SD = 23.17) and female (M = 34.51, SD = 21.45); t-value t(275) = 0.9 and significance difference (2 tailed value) is 0.35. This supports hypothesis two.

Also, investigating the difference between male and female perception of unwanted sexual harassment, the results show that there is no significant difference in scores for male (M = 58.38, SD = 30.22) and female (M = 53.51, SD = 28.45); t-value t(275) = 1.4 and significance difference (2 tailed value) is 0.18. Therefore, hypothesis three is supported.

4.3 Discussion
The findings from this study show that male employees of the Nigerian deposit money banks view gender harassment, sexual coercion and unwanted sexual harassment in a similar manner as their female colleagues. The findings corroborate studies (Abe, 2012; Ekore, 2012) which found no significance difference between male and female perceived sexual harassment. This support the claims that differences are less pronounce among male and female employees’ perceived sexual behaviours as both gender view such behaviour similarly and clearly (Bell et al. 2002). Also, the fact that women recognise that taking less serious forms of sexual harassment too seriously can have negative effects on the way women are perceived may have influenced the outcome of this study. As opined by Lee (2001), women unwillingness to label some sexual behaviour as sexual harassment does not mean that they welcome or accept the actual behaviour. In addition,
sexual harassment training programmes introduced by many organisations often targeted on male employees may have influenced the increasing awareness and sensitivity of male to harassment issues. As Tinkler (2008) observed, men and women define sexual harassment in relation to the degree to which they view sexual harassment rules as ambiguous and threatening to the workplace.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated perceptual gender differences on sexual harassment in the Nigerian banks. The findings revealed that male and female employees do not differ in perceived gender harassment, perceived sexual coercion and perceived unwanted attention. In order for Nigerian banks to develop adequate policy on sexual harassment, managers should be aware that shared framework or approach may appropriate for both male and female as suggested by the findings of this study.

Consequently, adequate policy should be developed for all employees to clearly understand the clues that may result in sexual harassment issues. Similarly, organisations can provide specialised trained personnel who can help employees determine workplace behaviour that results to sexual harassment claims. This will ultimately assist employees’ understanding of sexual harassment issues within the work environment.

REFERENCES

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