

The prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe in the twenty-first century: Perceptions from students and lecturers in Zimbabwe State Universities

Tenson T. Mugodzwa & Modester Dadirai Ngwerume

Abstract

Sexual harassment cases are on the increase in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning. However, very few of them are officially recorded, reported, or made public. Sexual harassment as a gender issue, is of paramount importance as it has to do with human rights, individual dignity, and psychological stability. Yet oral reflections from students indicate the soaring prevalence of sexual harassment and non-attention to the cases or rehabilitation of affected victims. This scenario requires attention, massive research, and strategies to mitigate the prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning in order to produce all-round, robust, creative, innovative, and technologically motivated industrial graduates. This paper is of the contention that sexual harassment cases are not only prevalent but are on the increase in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning, albeit with most of them going unreported or being swept under the carpet so as to protect the integrity, public scrutiny, and image of the institutions involved. The paper argues that male and female students, as well as lecturers, are mostly perpetrators, victims, or both of sexual harassment. The paper maintains that sexual harassment as a gender issue, is rooted in the feminist theory of gender inequality. This study is grounded in the radical and socialist feminist theories of gender inequality. The study comprised 114 students, 4 Executive Deans of students, 4 Counsellors, and 20 lecturers. The research method used was both qualitative and quantitative. The research findings revealed that sexual harassment is prevalent in Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning and that very few cases are formally reported, recorded, and made public. The study recommends that institutions of higher learning need to put in place and implement sexual harassment policies. Reporting structures must be communicated to all stakeholders and punitive measures, guidance, and counseling be availed to reduce sexual harassment issues.

Keywords: sexual harassment, gender issue, feminist theory, gender empowerment, sexual harassment policy.

