

Cybersexual harassment in a state university in Zimbabwe: Voices of female students

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Abstract

Social media has become a very popular means of communication between and among people as Internet use has increased globally. This means of communication has led to an upsurge in negative online behaviours such as cyber sexual harassment. Cybersexual harassment as a negative online behaviour adversely impacts university students' well-being and interferes with their ability to learn. Whilst there has been intensive research on online sexual harassment, there is a paucity of empirical examination of cyber sexual harassment especially among female university students. Addressing cyber sexual harassment in universities is important and makes the object of this research. This case study research, therefore, investigated female undergraduate students' experiences of cyber sexual harassment. This is a study in which the voices of cyber sexual harassment victims were captured through interviewing undergraduate female student participants. Qualitative data was collected from in-depth interviews with purposely selected undergraduate female student participants. Twenty undergraduate female students of the 2022 academic year at a selected university were purposively sampled for the study. Cybersexual harassment experiences of participants emerging from the qualitative interview exercise were: receiving explicit images and videos; being requested for sex and nude pictures by perpetrators and being subjected to sexually explicit hate speeches. In view of these findings, the recommendations of the study are that: awareness programmes should be mounted in the university to inform students about the dangers of cybersexual harassment; there is a need to educate students about their rights and dangers obtaining in cyberspace; anti-cyber sexual harassment programmes tailored for university students may be a step in the right direction; the need to encourage conversation about cybersexual harassment within the university community cannot be overemphasized.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, cyber sexual harassment, online harassment, digital harassment, internet, university students.