Assessment of the Implementation of Policy on Anti-Sexual Harassment in a Nigerian University

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment in universities undermines gender equity, safety, and learning. This study assessed the level of implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy and the influence of implementation of the policy on gender protection of students and staff of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Nigeria. The study was hinged on the feminist theory. The feminist theory considers the plight of any person or people not just women, with a view to destabilizing systems of power and oppression, especially in an academic environment as in this context. The study adopted cross sectional survey research design. The population comprised of 450 students and 200 members of staff (100 teaching and non-teaching staff each) making a total of 650 participants, using a stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation from the 10 selected faculties. Data was collected using questionnaires and gathered data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results identified gaps in initial awareness and understanding of the anti-sexual harassment policy among students and staff which constituted a setback for the implementation. It was equally noted that the policy development process lacked inclusivity, and implementation activities were perceived as insufficient. Since the implementation process was faulty, the policy has not been able to significantly achieve gender protection on the Campus. The students had uncertain views on the policy's impact, while staff had mixed opinions. The study recommended the need to strengthen policy implementation by way of improving communication channels, transparency, stakeholders' involvement, and monitoring while punitive measures must be enforced when necessary.

KEYWORDS

Gender; equity; learning; protection; monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

The academic environment and atmosphere at every level is expected to be entirely safe and void of any form of intimidation or harassment for quality learning to take place and to also build a sense of trust in the learners about the integrity of the teachers and instructors, as well the educational system. Universities are institutions of higher learning where a high level of manpower training is provided for recipients (Fasanmi & Seyama, 2023). Sexual harassment is a matter of serious concern in higher education institutions worldwide. It is a form of gender abuse that violates the fundamental rights and dignity of individuals, affecting their well-being and academic performance (Cantalupo & Kidder, 2018). In the context of universities, it creates an unsafe and hostile environment that hinders the academic and personal growth of students (Hill & Silva, 2005). Sexual harassment in Nigerian universities is a pervasive issue that has garnered significant attention in recent years which necessitated the call for drastic intervention on the part of the Management of these institutions. One of such interventions is the drafting of sexual harassment policy with the institution of sexual harassment committees in the various faculties and units in the universities. Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) which is the focus of this study, through the Center for Gender and Social Policy Studies (CGSPS), instituted the sexual harassment policy in 2017. However, the implementation of the policy was not really given much attention by the institution until 2021 when cases of sexual harassment which trended as "sex for grade" rocked the institution, which led to the dismissal of some members of academic staff who were found culpable in the reported scandals.

Sexual harassment has become a matter of serious concern in universities. However, there appears to be a little understanding of the causes of the problem and the demography of sexual harassers and their victims. In addressing the problem, the university authorities have often given a reactive disposition through the setting up of investigation panels and trials that often punish those who were accused. The menace of sexual harassment is not a strange development in the human society which the university is a subset of. It has always been an existent reality that a lot of victims prefer to suffer in silence, rather than report because of fear and the issue of self-esteem. The university under study has done much to convince the public by portraying itself in the media as one that is intolerant of sexual harassment but the recorded cases in the University have placed it in a very bad limelight.

According to a statement issued by the Public Relations Officer of Obafemi Awolowo University, Abiodun Olarewaju, and reported in The Punch Newspaper, the University Council dismissed a lecturer after finding him guilty of sexual harassment against a female student (The Guardian, 2022). The statement read: "In its avowed determination to rid the University of any form of sexual intimidation, harassment and, or coercion, the Governing Council of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, has dismissed another lecturer who was found guilty of sexual misconduct against a female student" (The Guardian, 2022).

The University Council of OAU declared zero tolerance towards sexual harassment after deliberating on the report of a Joint Committee that investigated the above reported case in

2021. The reports stated that appropriate sanctions were applied as contained in the University regulations. Earlier, the University Management had formally inaugurated an Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy and then Vice-Chancellor also reiterated the University's commitment to upholding a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment at several forums. The then University Council under the leadership of the Chairman also at different times pledged support for policies promoting safety for every member within the university community.

The implementation of anti-sexual harassment policies in OAU is a response to this pressing issue. These policies aim to provide a safe and respectful environment for all members of the university community. This policy outlines the university's stance against sexual harassment and provides a framework for addressing such incidents. It must however be stated that the effectiveness of this policy, just like any other policy, is contingent on its implementation. Several studies have highlighted the challenges in implementing anti-sexual harassment policies in universities. These challenges include inadequate funding and resources, inappropriate placement, exploitation, and sexual harassment of students, and inadequate duration and disruption of the program due to industrial actions (Adjei et al., 2014a; Akomaning et al., 2011; Contractor, 2019; Nunfam et al., 2015; Zhang, 2020). These challenges can hinder the effectiveness of the policy and its ability to create a safe and respectful environment.

The effectiveness of anti-sexual harassment policies in universities is not only dependent on the policies themselves but also on the broader context in which they are implemented. For instance, the political and economic stability of a country can significantly influence the implementation of such policies (Al-Saqqaf & Williamson, 2023). In countries undergoing political instability or economic crises, the implementation of these policies can be hindered due to a lack of resources and attention to these issues. Moreover, the involvement of key implementers in the planning and implementation of these policies is crucial. When policymakers plan a policy without involving implementers, the needs or interests of the implementers may not be well represented, leading to challenges in implementation (Al-Saqqaf & Williamson, 2023). Therefore, a bottom-up approach that involves the perspectives of university administrators, teachers, and students can enhance the effectiveness of these policies.

Furthermore, the provision of necessary infrastructure, such as appropriate facilities and resources, is essential for the successful implementation of these policies. Universities need to ensure that they have the necessary infrastructure to support the implementation of these policies. This includes not only the physical infrastructure, but also the necessary resources for training and awareness-raising about sexual harassment, and the policies in place to address it. The implementation of anti-sexual harassment policies in universities is a complex process that requires careful planning, adequate resources, and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. By considering these factors, universities can enhance the effectiveness of their anti-sexual harassment policies and create a safer and more respectful environment for all members of their community.

The study was guided by two objectives namely, to assess the level of implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy and to determine the influence of the policy on gender protection of members of the university community. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated to further guide the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual harassment falls within the category of gender-based violence (GBV). Gender-based violence is a form of brutality perpetuated against anyone on account of gender biases that are underscored by patriarchal asymmetrical power relations (Mutinta, 2022). In addition to the sexual dimension, GBV can be physical, verbal and emotional (Mutinta, 2022). Sexual harassment of women across different ages is a problem of global gender inequalities; however, the situation is exacerbated in Africa, where there is an entrenched patriarchal culture and women's economic dependence on men (Dranzoa, 2018). In a world that has acknowledged gender inequalities and is even making efforts to include it as one of the sustainable development goals (SDG 5), the OECD reported in 2022 that gender-based violence, particularly against women, remains a hindrance to the achievement of SGD 5 by 2030 (OECD, 2022). Furthermore, the UN Women (2022) report notes that the world is not progressing adequately toward achieving gender equality by 2030. More worrying is that violence against women continues to be prevalent, with global health, climate, and humanitarian crises exacerbating the risk, particularly for the most marginalised women and girls.

Additionally, women now report feeling less secure compared to the period before the pandemic (UN, 2022). The repercussions extend beyond the individual impact on women and girls, who constitute over half of the global population. Their well-being has significant economic and social implications (UN, 2023). Therefore, addressing women's sexual harassment in Africa demands equal commitment and effective measures of gender equality and diversity (Dranzoa, 2018).

Sexual harassment is not easily definable because of its complex nature, including the related cultural, personal and contextual nuances (The World Bank, 2018). Superson (1993) recognised the limitations of the subjective definition of sexual harassment, which caused more harm to women. She offered what could be read as an objective moral definition,

…any behaviour (verbal or physical) caused by a person, A, in the dominant class directed at another, B, in the subjugated class, that expresses and perpetuates the attitude that B or members of B sex &/are inferior because of their sex, thereby causing ham to either B and/or members of B's sex (Superson, 1993, p. 47).

Scholars concur that sexual harassment encompasses unwanted sexual overtures or suggestions from a person with power of any gender (Ogbonnaya et al., 2011). The unsolicited sexual attention does not necessarily infer it was enforced; therefore, sexual behaviour is considered unwelcome if the victim sees it that way (UNWomenwatch n.d.). Whether someone truly welcomed a request for a date, a sexually suggestive comment, or a joke, depends on all

the surrounding circumstances (UNWomenwatch n.d.). The basis of this is crossing boundaries that distress the person (Superson, 1993). The acts are usually considered harassment if they are "repeated and continuous" (Hill & Silva, 2005). However, research notes that even a single inappropriate act of victimisation – be it verbal or physical, may constitute sexual harassment (Paglia, 2000).

Sexual harassment, as an old-age offence against mainly women, was given the term in the early 1970s and its use became widespread in the 1980s (Hill & Silva, 2005). It has become one of the 21st century's most prevalent and studied phenomena globally. Men and women are victims of sexual harassment. However, global statistics point to women as the most severely affected victims, and their victimisation is relentless and systematic (Adams, Mabusela & Dlamini, 2013). Superson (1993) argues that sexual harassment is the most ubiquitous form of prejudice against women. Globally and in most African countries, it is categorised as a crime against women (UN, 2023); however, progressive countries also include males as victims (Adams et al., 2013). Sexual harassment as an uninvited and undesirable behaviour covers a broad spectrum of unacceptable sexually-oriented actions (UN Womenwatch, n.d.). It is characterised by unsolicited verbal, non-verbal and physical sexually-suggestive attention, starting with leering and continuing with touching (Mafadza, 2020). Sexual harassment behaviours include inappropriate touching of women's body parts associated with sexual attraction and unwanted and overly persistent flirtatious behaviour (Mutinta, 2022). According to the Commission for Conciliation and Arbitration (CCMA, 2022), sexual harassment also includes "strip-searching, including by a person of the same or opposite sex; following, watching, accosting or pursuing a person" (p. 1). Verbal harassment involves derogatory remarks and inappropriate jokes that have a sexual undertone (Mafadza, 2020). For example, "innuendos, suggestions, hints, comments with sexual overtones, sex-related jokes or insults, graphic comments about a person's body, inappropriate enquiries about a person's sex life; whistling of a sexual nature; sending of sexually explicit text or messages" (CCMA, 2022, p.1).

Some behaviours include solicitations for sexual acts and emails that are explicit or offensive in nature (CCMA, 2022). As noted above, there are different dimensions of sexual harassment, which creates nuances that are not easy to recognise or explain. For instance, the notion of Quid Pro Quo or exchange-based harassment involves the victim's surrender to a sexual act that is either overtly or covertly expected as a requirement for employment or employment benefits (Samuels, 2003; UN Womenwatch, n.d.)— Moreover, the refusal to accede risks lead to the withdrawal of employment offer or benefit.

Sexual Harassment: Higher Education Institutions

According to Koi et al. (2018), sexual harassment is recognised as a worldwide issue, with 24% of incidents occurring within higher education institutions (HEIs). African society is witnessing a rise in the occurrence of gender-based violence (Dranzoa, 2018). Scholars argue that HEIs are experiencing high rates of women's sexual harassment, which relates to growing societal GBV because they are the microcosms of society (Adams et al., 2013). From the North to the South

of Africa, women face sexual harassment. Dranzoa (2018) notes that in Egypt, almost all women, around 99%, encounter sexual harassment. In Ethiopia, more than 78% of female students have reported harassment (The World Bank, 2018, p. 2). According to Makhaye et al. (2023), the latest studies and reports indicate that between 20% and 25% of South African female students report sexual harassment cases during their university studies. Nonetheless, these figures might not fully capture the extent of the issue since many female students choose not to report instances of sexual victimisation (Makhaye et al., 2023). In Nigeria, sexual harassment is a historically significant challenge for numerous students (Akinbode & Ayodeji, 2018; Ogbonnaya et al., 2011). Onoyase (2019) laments the loss of Nigerian HEIs as the intellectual 'Ivory Towers' to become dominant sexual harassment sites from the 1990s to the present era. According to The World Bank (2018), "In Nigeria, 70 per cent of female graduates from a sample of tertiary institutions reported having been sexually harassed, with the main perpetrators being classmates and lecturers" (p. 2). There is a consensus that most sexual harassment cases are not reported. This reluctance to come forward means that the statistics concerning this crime could be misleading. The World Bank (2018) notes that "common reasons for not reporting include (a) believing that the behaviour was not serious, (b) thinking it is easier to keep quiet or quit rather than face the discomfort of confrontation, and (c) an inability to prove the claim with evidence" (p. 3).

Research confirms that female academics are also affected; however, female students across Africa are affected more because of the asymmetrical power relations with academics/lecturers/professors (Dranzoa, 2018), including administrators. However, this issue also arises due to the patriarchal culture that elevates and glorifies men, leading to instances where young men on campuses engage in harassing female students. Tedros-Solomon's (2016) Ethiopian study identified that female students are the primary victims of sexual harassment, and male instructors are often reported as the culprits. Akinbode and Ayodeji's (2018) Nigerian study established that female victims are targeted by aggressive, domineering, and territorial harassers; thus, they are likely to experience notably more severe psycho-physiological issues than their male counterparts. In the Nigerian context, studies have established that the problem of exchange-based harassment is rife. Female students enter sexual relationships with male professors to gain higher marks (Nwadiani, 2018). Professors also offer or leak examination question papers to lure students for sex (Onoyase, 2019). Furthermore, due to most students' disadvantaged backgrounds, they also explore sexual relationships for money to support their basic needs (Nwadiani, 2018). Onoyase (2019) also revealed that well-positioned non-academic male staff exploit students' desperation for admission into the programmes and places in residences.

Effects of Sexual Harassment

Victims of sexual harassment suffer traumatic and severe psychological and physical harm. Sexual harassment can have profound effects on women, organisations and society (Tedros-Solomons, 2016). However, women carry the brunt of it as they are the direct victims.

Psychological harm or distress is the primary effect. The act is traumatic, and women experience post-traumatic stress, constant anxiety, stress and depression (Taiwo, Omole & Omole, 2014).

In some cases, women the trauma manifests as irritation, aggression and violent outbursts. In the short and long term, victims suffer emotionally, mentally, physically, economically and socially as they become fearful and lose a sense of safety and confidence (Omorogiuwa, 2018). For female scholars and students, engagement in their work and academic pursuits declines, negatively affecting their ability to cope (Taiwo et al., 2014). Sexual harassment can have harmful consequences on women's lives, also affecting their families and personal relationships (Omorogiuwa, 2018). Depression stemming from sexual harassment impacts personal connections, leading victims to pull away from family, romantic partners, and friends. Feeling uneasy in social settings, they retreat into isolation, resulting in loneliness (Tedros-Solomons, 2016). Women who undergo sexual harassment also endure emotional repercussions as they face financial burdens from medical expenses and counselling, which can be costly and necessitate prolonged treatment (Tedros-Solomons, 2016).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Theory and Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment has been receiving attention since the early 1970s. However, there are still many women experiencing it, and most of them do not get justice when reporting these cases. With some of the stereotypes remaining persistent in the fight against women's sexual harassment, scholars argue for the use of the feminist lens to strengthen women's legal cases (Samuels, 2003). OECD (2023) concurs that over the years, the gender paradigm in policymaking has stimulated many countries to develop and implement sexual harassment policies which prevent it and penalise perpetrators. Feminist theorists illuminate the problem of sexual harassment from various theories. A prevalent theory is the biological perspective, which portrays men as the seekers of women, the hunters, and those expected to be vigilant and regard them as potential partners (Paglia, 2000). The socio-cultural perspective emphasizes the historical dominance of male power as the foundation of females' powerlessness and lower social status (Paulsen & Smart, 2013). In organisations, leadership is normalised as a male terrain, and women are aesthetically objectified under strong man leadership (Paulsen & Smart, 2013). Consequently, in organisations, men hold more power, which they exploit to perpetrate women's sexual harassment.

The fundamental feminist theory's standpoint is the problematisation of modern society's historical, structural and oppressive patriarchal culture (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Many cultures in the global North and South are underscored by patriarchal hegemony, which promotes gender inequality and sexual violence against women (Mekgwe, 2006). This culture continues even when political and legal progress has been attained in fighting for women's rights and dignity; hence, in African contexts, black or African feminism is crucial to reclaiming women's emancipation in the postcolonial era (Salane, 2018). The feminist perspective plays a vital role in arguing for the recognition of sexual harassment as an offence on its own; thus, it

should not be encapsulated as one of the dimensions of bullying as has been the widespread practice in organisations (Samuels, 2003). In this sense, feminism contends that the prevailing challenges of sexual harassment in organisations, including HEIs, lie with the failure to recognise that it is a power and political problem. Hence, African feminism is apt to offer a lens that foregrounds a colonial patriarchal insertion on postcolonial Africa that undermines female agency and emancipation (Osha, 2006). As Mekgwe (2006) argues, African feminists' decolonial discourses are vital in unpacking gender inequality challenges and reclaiming black women's power.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted cross sectional survey research design. The population comprised of 450 students (undergraduates and postgraduates) comprising of 230 males and 220 females and 200 members of staff (100 teaching and non-teaching staff each, comprising of 120 males and 80 females, 130 Academic and 70 Non-academic staff) making a total of 650 participants using a stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of male and female undergraduate and postgraduate students and male and female academic and non-academic staff from the ten selected faculties. Data was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaire items were self-designed based on the prevailing situation in the sampled university vis-à-vis the university sexual harassment policy. The questionnaire items were validated by experts in the area of educational evaluation and measurement and educational management. The constructs were found to reliable and capable of eliciting the intended information. The gathered data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research questions were analysed using frequency counts while the hypothesis was tested using chi-square statistics.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the level of implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy since its inauguration at OAU?

Table 1.

Anti-Harassment Policy Implementation Activities and Resourcing (Students) (see appendix).

Table 1 presents students' responses regarding the level of implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy at Obafemi Awolowo University.

For promoting awareness, 13.9% strongly disagreed and 16.5% disagreed that the policy is widely promoted to students, while 25.8% somewhat agreed and 20.9% strongly agreed. This indicates mixed perceptions about how widely awareness is spread.

On accessibility of the policy document, 14.7% strongly disagreed and 20.8% disagreed it is easily accessible, while 23.8% somewhat agreed and 14.7% strongly agreed. This suggests some challenges in the availability of the full policy text.

Regarding regular anti-harassment training, 12.6% strongly disagreed and 12.8% disagreed it is provided to all students, while 25.5% somewhat agreed and 19% strongly agreed. This implies potential gaps in universal training coverage.

For frequent reminders about the university's stance, 13.6% strongly disagreed and 21.2% disagreed students are frequently reminded, while 21.9% somewhat agreed and 17.7% strongly agreed. This shows mixed views on regular communications.

On resource dedication, 12.1% strongly disagreed and 12.1% disagreed sufficient resources are dedicated to implementation, while 29.9% agreed and 19.7% strongly agreed. This indicates moderately positive perceptions of resource allocation.

These results show varying levels of agreement on dimensions of policy implementation including awareness promotion, accessibility, training, reminders, and resources. There appear to be opportunities to strengthen implementation according to students' perspectives.

Table 2.

Anti-Harassment Policy Implementation Activities and Resourcing (Staffs) (see appendix).

Table 2 presents staff responses regarding the level of implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy at Obafemi Awolowo University. For promoting awareness among staff, 10% strongly disagreed and 20% disagreed that the policy is widely promoted, while 30% somewhat agreed and 30% strongly agreed. This indicates relatively mixed views on the breadth of awareness efforts. On the availability of comprehensive information and training, 10% strongly disagreed and 20% disagreed it is available to staff, while 35% somewhat agreed and 20% strongly agreed. This suggests some gaps in access to full information and training. Regarding general staff knowledge, 10% strongly disagreed, 17.5% disagreed, 12.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, 40% somewhat agreed, and 20% strongly agreed. This reflects moderately high but varied levels of perceived policy knowledge among staff. For adequacy of training provision, 25% strongly disagreed and 20% disagreed the university provides adequate training to all staff, while 30% somewhat agreed and 10% strongly agreed. This points to potential deficiencies in universal training. On resource dedication, 10% strongly disagreed, 15% disagreed, 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, 40% agreed, and 15% strongly agreed. This indicates moderately positive but mixed views on resource allocation. The results show room for improvement in awareness promotion, information and training availability, knowledge, training adequacy, and resources related to policy implementation for staff according to their perceptions.

Table 3.

Perceived Impacts of Anti-Harassment Policy on Gender Protection (Students) (see appendix).

Table 3 displays students' responses (N = 450) on 5 statements assessing the influence of the anti-sexual harassment policy implementation on gender protection at Obafemi Awolowo University. For the statement "The policy has helped promote gender equality at the university", 10.4% strongly disagreed and 15.2% disagreed. Meanwhile, 27.7% agreed and 22.3% strongly agreed. 24% neither agreed nor disagreed. This indicates mixed perceptions, with around a quarter of students agreeing the policy has improved gender equality but a similar proportion

disagreeing. On the statement "I feel safer and more respected on campus since the policy was implemented", 13.2% strongly disagreed and 22.5% disagreed. In comparison, 20.6% agreed and 17.5% strongly agreed. 25.8% neither agreed nor disagreed. Again, this reflects uncertainty among students, with around 40% feeling less safe and respected but 38% feeling more so since the policy implementation. For the statement "The policy has created a better learning environment for all genders", 52 students 11.3% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. However, more students agreed, with 34.2% agreeing and 23.2% strongly agreeing. 25.5% neither agreed nor disagreed. This indicates moderately positive perceptions that the policy has improved the learning climate across genders. Regarding the statement "The University takes complaints about sexual harassment more seriously now", 11.7% strongly disagreed and 17.1% disagreed. On the other hand, 27.3% agreed and 15.8% strongly agreed, while 26.4% neither agreed nor disagreed. This suggests uncertainty around whether the university's response to harassment complaints has changed.

Finally, for the statement "Victims of sexual harassment receive more support from the university now", 13.4% disagreed and 6.5% strongly disagreed. However, 23.6% agreed and 23.2% strongly agreed, while 31.8% neither agreed nor disagreed. As with other statements, perceptions were mixed on whether victim support has increased under the policy.

In summary, analysis of Table 4.9 indicates students have uncertain and polarized views regarding the anti-harassment policy's impact on gender equality, safety, learning climate, institutional response, and victim support. The mixed results highlight opportunities to strengthen the policy implementation and outcomes around gender protection.

Table 4.

Perceived Impacts of Anti-Harassment Policy on Gender Protection (Staffs) (see appendix).

Table 4 presents staff responses (N = 200) on 5 statements assessing the influence of the anti-sexual harassment policy implementation on gender protection at Obafemi Awolowo University.

For the statement "The policy has helped promote gender equality among staff", 20 staff (10%) strongly disagreed and 40 staff (20%) disagreed. In comparison, 70 staff (35%) agreed and 50 staff (25%) strongly agreed. 20 staff (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed. This indicates polarized views, with around 30% feeling the policy has not improved gender equality but 60% believing it has. On the statement "I feel safer and more respected at work since the policy was implemented", 15 staff (7.5%) strongly disagreed and 25 staff (12.5%) disagreed. Meanwhile, 80 staff (40%) agreed and 60 staff (30%) strongly agreed, while 20 staff (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed. This suggests most staff feel safer and more respected since the policy, but around 20% do not.

Regarding the statement "The policy has improved the work environment for all genders", 25 staff (12.5%) disagreed and 25 staff (12.5%) strongly disagreed. However, 74 staff (37%) agreed and 56 staff (28%) strongly agreed, while 20 staff (10%) neither agreed nor

disagreed. As with previous statements, perceptions are mixed but lean toward the policy having a positive impact.

For the statement "Sexual harassment complaints from staff are taken more seriously now", 10 staff (5%) strongly disagreed and 40 staff (20%) disagreed. In comparison, 75 staff (37.5%) agreed and 50 staff (25%) strongly agreed, with 25 staff (12.5%) neutral. This indicates uncertainty around changes to how complaints are handled. Finally, on the statement "Victims of sexual harassment receive more organizational support now", 15 staff (7.5%) strongly disagreed and 20 staff (10%) disagreed. 90 staff (45%) agreed and 35 staff (17.5%) strongly agreed, while 40 staff (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed. As with the student sample, views on support for victims are polarized.

The analysis of Table 4 shows staff have mixed perceptions regarding the policy's impact on equality, safety, work climate, complaint handling, and victim support. The results highlight opportunities to enhance outcomes related to gender protection among staff.

Hypothesis Testing

The implementation of the Anti-Sexual Harassment policy has no significant influence on the gender protection of members (students and staff) of the Obafemi Awolowo University community.

The independent variable was the implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy, while the dependent variable was perceived gender protection. Gender protection was measured based on survey responses to 5 statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The chi-square test compared the observed frequencies of survey responses on the gender protection statements to the expected frequencies if there was no association between policy implementation and gender protection perceptions.

The results of the chi-square test are presented in Table 5 below:

The chi-square test result was significant, χ^2 (4, N = 1362) = 421.88, p < .001. This indicates a significant association between the implementation of the anti-sexual harassment policy and perceived gender protection.

Table 5.

Chi-Square Test for Association between Policy Implementation and Perceived Gender Protection

Category	Observed	Expected	Residual
Strongly Disagree	145	154	-9
Disagree	237	154	83
Neutral	345	154	191
Agree	456	154	302
Strongly Agree	179	154	25

$\chi 2$ (4, N = 1362) = 421.88, p < .001

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and concluded that the policy implementation has had a statistically significant influence on perceived gender protection among students and staff at Obafemi Awolowo University. The policy appears to have enhanced feelings of equality, safety, support, and learning climate across genders based on the survey responses.

The large chi-square value and residuals on the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" categories show that significantly more respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the policy has improved gender equality, safety, support, complaint handling, and environment.

This provides quantitative empirical evidence to support the conclusion that the anti-sexual harassment policy has had a positive impact on advancing gender protection and creating a more inclusive climate at Obafemi Awolowo University.

The significant results align with many of the descriptive survey findings on improved awareness, reporting, enforcement, and leadership response under the policy. This hypothesis testing adds statistical power to validate those perceptions based on community experiences.

DISCUSSION

In relation to the strengthening of initial and ongoing policy awareness, the study revealed that there are gaps in awareness and understanding of the policy among both students and staff when first arriving at OAU. As Cantalupo and Kidder (2018) emphasize, lack of awareness severely undercuts policy prevention and reporting. The findings underscore the need to strengthen initial outreach and new student/staff orientation on the policy through multiple informational channels tailored to OAU's diverse community (Roark, 2022). Sustained awareness efforts via websites, signage, social media, events and training are equally critical, given population turnover (Stark et al., 2022). Messaging should clarify reporting procedures, resources, rights and responsibilities. Student ambassadors could aid promotion.

In relation to the enhancement of transparent, participatory and inclusive policy processes, the students felt only moderately consulted in the policy's development, perceiving an administration-driven process. Staff also noted limited inclusion of their perspective. In line with the position of Holland and Cortina (2017), stakeholder participation in planning not only builds confidence in the policy but also identifies overlooked needs. Fasanmi (2021) noted that the university needs to protect its students and staff to be able to attract foreign faculty members and students. The findings signal opportunities at OAU to increase transparency on policy motivations and involve students, staff and management in more participatory, iterative review processes via surveys, town halls and advisory committees.

In the operationalization of the Policy through the strengthened training, communication and resourcing, the students and staff perceived gaps in the implementation of activities that includes the training, reminders and resource allocation. McDonald (2014) noted that comprehensive training, visible reinforcement through leadership messaging, and dedicated funding, are instrumental in activating policies. OAU could require more robust annual trainings,

incorporating diverse scenarios and peer intervention skills. Leadership could regularly reaffirm zero-tolerance stances. Adequate budgeting for preventive education and victim services could reinforce OAU's commitment.

The mixed perceived impact highlighted the need for strengthened implementation and evaluation. The students expressed uncertainty about whether the policy has improved gender equality, safety, institutional response and support. Staff held somewhat more positive but also ambiguous views on policy outcomes. Such mixed results are common challenges in evaluating anti-harassment policies' impacts (Stark et al., 2022). The findings suggest that OAU needs to intensify efforts in the area of transparency and outcome measurement. Annual surveys, focus groups and external audits could also assist in tracking the progress of the implementation.

In addressing the implementation of barriers around awareness, trust, training, enforcement and culture, students and staff cited persisting barriers including awareness gaps, distrust in complaint handling, insufficient training and enforcement, and lingering cultural tolerance of harassment. Comparative research corroborates these multidimensional challenges across institutions (Roark, 2022; Holland & Cortina, 2017). While indicating progress, OAU must continue addressing these barriers through strengthened transparency, accountability, training, communications and cultural change.

The study showed that despite the gaps, statistical analysis verified the anti-harassment policy has significantly advanced perceived gender protection at OAU. This quantitative evidence affirms progress made while signifying the need for continual improvements in awareness, trust, training, enforcement and evaluation. The nuanced qualitative findings provide insights to guide sharpened, evidence-based strategies tailored to OAU's context. Sustained participatory engagement in policy implementation will be key to translating anti-harassment principles into action.

The study yielded multifaceted insights into the strengths, weaknesses and stakeholder experiences surrounding OAU's anti-harassment policy rollout. While impacts were achieved, targeted collaborative efforts to address barriers around awareness, training, culture, inclusion and transparency can help OAU realize the full potential of its policy in fostering equity, safety and respect.

CONCLUSIONS

The results revealed gaps in awareness, understanding, inclusion and transparency around the policy's origins and motivations, based on student and staff perspectives. Implementation areas like training, enforcement, reporting, leadership response, and resource allocation were viewed as having room for improvement. Students expressed uncertainty and polarization regarding the policy's impact on gender equality, safety, learning climate, institutional follow-up, and victim support. Staff held moderately positive but also mixed views on changes under the policy. However, statistical analysis validated that despite imperfect implementation, the policy has significantly advanced gender protection. These findings showcase the nuanced real-world

experiences and perspectives of students and staff regarding this anti-harassment policy rollout. While positive impacts are evident, clear opportunities exist to address weaknesses and build on strengths to further improve gender inclusion, safety and respect. Key priorities highlighted include: boosting awareness, training, enforcement, transparency, complaint handling and shifting cultural attitudes. Ultimately, diligent and adaptable policy implementation, paired with sustained engagement across stakeholders, will be essential to translating the anti-harassment policy from words into action. This study provides granular empirical insight to inform targeted enhancements over time. Further research can build on these findings through comparative assessments and longitudinal tracking. However, the current analysis offers a valuable reference point and model for pragmatic, participatory policy evaluation.

Recommendations

On the strength of the findings, the study recommended the need for increased awareness and understanding of the policy among students and staff through multiple communication channels like orientations, seminars, posters, university website or intranet, social media and accessibility in multiple formats and languages to reach the diverse university community. The study equally recommended the need to improve transparency around policy development and implementation by sharing information on motivations, data, and decision-making. Since the participants and the end users are crucial in the policy process, the study recommended the need to incorporate student and staff perspectives in policy review processes through surveys, focus groups, and committee representation. In the area of training, the policy recommended the need to expand mandatory annual anti-harassment training for all students and staff, tailored to their roles. Resources, be it human, physical or financial, are instrumental in every policy process, the study recommended the need to dedicate more resources to awareness campaigns, training programs, reporting mechanisms, and victim support services; and to build trust in the system.

Limitations to the Study

One major limitation of the study was the reluctance of the respondents to provide responses during the data collection process. This is understandable due to the sensitivity of the subject of consideration. The researcher explained the intents of the study to the respondents, and this was helpful to a reasonable extent.

Disclosure and Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning this paper, as well as the published research results, including the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining and using its results, as well as any non-financial personal relationships.

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APPENDIX

Table 1.

Anti-Harassment Policy Implementation Activities and Resourcing (Students).

Statement	Responses	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
The university widely promotes awareness of the anti-harassment policy among students.	Strongly disagree	63	13.9
	Somewhat Disagree	74	16.5
	Neither agree or disagree	102	22.7
	Somewhat Agree	116	25.8
	Strongly agree	94	20.9
	No response	1	0.2
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
The full policy document is easily accessible to any student.	Strongly disagree	66	14.7
	Somewhat Disagree	94	20.8
	Neither agree or disagree	112	24.9
	Somewhat Agree	107	23.8
	Strongly agree	66	14.7
	No response	5	1.1

	Total	450	100.0

Statement	Responses	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
There is regular anti-harassment training provided to all students.	Strongly disagree	57	12.6
	Somewhat Disagree	58	12.8
	Neither agree or disagree	130	29
	Somewhat Agree	115	25.5
	Strongly agree	86	19
	No response	5	1.1
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
Students are frequently reminded about the university's stance against sexual harassment.	Strongly disagree	61	13.6
	Somewhat Disagree	95	21.2
	Neither agree or disagree	107	23.8
	Somewhat Agree	99	21.9
	Strongly agree	80	17.7
	No response	8	1.7
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
The university dedicates sufficient resources to policy implementation.	Strongly disagree	54	12.1
	Disagree	54	12.1
	Neither agree or disagree	115	25.5
	Agree	135	29.9
	Strongly agree	88	19.7
	No Response	3	0.6
	Total	**450**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey

Table 2.

Anti-Harassment Policy Implementation Activities and Resourcing (Staffs).

Statement	Responses	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
The policy is widely promoted among staff at the university.	Strongly disagree	20	10
	Somewhat Disagree	40	20
	Neither agree or disagree	20	10
	Somewhat Agree	60	30
	Strongly agree	60	30
	Total	**200**	**100.0**

Comprehensive information and training is available to staff	Strongly disagree	20	10
	Somewhat Disagree	40	20
	Neither agree or disagree	30	15
	Somewhat Agree	70	35
	Strongly agree	40	20
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
In general, staff are knowledgeable about the policy.	Strongly disagree	20	10
	Somewhat Disagree	35	17.5
	Neither agree or disagree	25	12.5
	Somewhat Agree	80	40
	Strongly agree	40	20
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
The university provides adequate training to all staff.	Strongly disagree	50	25
	Somewhat Disagree	40	20
	Neither agree or disagree	30	15
	Somewhat Agree	60	30
	Strongly agree	20	10
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
The university dedicates sufficient resources to policy implementation for staff.	Strongly disagree	20	10
	Disagree	30	15
	Neither agree or disagree	40	20
	Agree	80	40
	Strongly agree	30	15
	Total	**200**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey

Table 3.

Perceived Impacts of Anti-Harassment Policy on Gender Protection (Students).

Statement	Responses	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
The policy has helped promote gender equality at the university.	Strongly disagree	47	10.4
	Disagree	68	15.2
	Neither agree or disagree	108	24
	Agree	125	27.7

	Strongly agree	100	22.3
	No Response	2	0.4
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
I feel safer and more respected on campus since the policy was implemented.	Strongly disagree	59	13.2
	Disagree	101	22.5
	Neither agree or disagree	116	25.8
	Agree	93	20.6
	Strongly agree	78	17.5
	No Response	2	0.4
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
The policy has created a better learning environment for all genders.	Strongly disagree	23	5
	Disagree	51	11.3
	Neither agree or disagree	115	25.5
	Agree	154	34.2
	Strongly agree	104	23.2
	No Response	4	0.9
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
The university takes complaints about sexual harassment more seriously now.	Strongly disagree	53	11.7
	Disagree	77	17.1
	Neither agree or disagree	119	26.4
	Agree	123	27.3
	Strongly agree	71	15.8
	No Response	8	1.7
	Total	**450**	**100.0**
Victims of sexual harassment receive more support from the university now.	Strongly disagree	29	6.5
	Disagree	60	13.4
	Neither agree or disagree	143	31.8
	Agree	106	23.6
	Strongly agree	104	23.2
	No Response	7	1.5
	Total	**450**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey

Table 4.

Perceived Impacts of Anti-Harassment Policy on Gender Protection (Staffs).

Statement	Responses	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)

The policy has helped promote gender equality among staff.	Strongly disagree	20	10
	Disagree	40	20
	Neither agree or disagree	20	10
	Agree	70	35
	Strongly agree	50	25
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
I feel safer and more respected at work since the policy was implemented.	Strongly disagree	15	7.5
	Disagree	25	12.5
	Neither agree or disagree	20	10
	Agree	80	40
	Strongly agree	60	30
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
The policy has improved the work environment for all genders.	Strongly disagree	25	12.5
	Disagree	25	12.5
	Neither agree or disagree	20	10
	Agree	74	37
	Strongly agree	56	28
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
Sexual harassment complaints from staff are taken more seriously now.	Strongly disagree	10	5
	Disagree	40	20
	Neither agree or disagree	25	12.5
	Agree	75	37.5
	Strongly agree	50	25
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
Victims of sexual harassment receive more organizational support now.	Strongly disagree	15	7.5
	Disagree	20	10
	Neither agree or disagree	40	20
	Agree	90	45
	Strongly agree	35	17.5
	No Response	15	7.5
	Total	**200**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey