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Psychological Impacts of Campus Sextortion on Female Undergraduates: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Chima Agazue*

School of Psychology, Arden University, 30 Holborn, London, United Kingdom

* Email: cagazue@arden.ac.uk

Abstract

Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs) have featured widely in media and academic literature as places where sextortion (sexual extortion) is commonplace. In many HEIs, male lecturers demand sex from their female students and in some cases, the former threaten the latter with fail when the latter rejects the sexual advances. This act has enormous psychological impacts on the victims. This current study explored such impacts on the victims selected from different HEIs in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data were utilised. A total of 15 female graduates and undergraduates from 8 HEIs participated in semi-structured interviews. All the participants were real victims of sextortion perpetrated by male lecturers in their institutions. Secondary data came from the personal accounts of 4 female victims whose accounts were published in the media. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse all the data. Three themes were developed, reflecting the victims' common psychological impacts. The themes are "living in fear", "feeling distressed" and "distrust of men". The first theme shows how the victims lived in fear of their lecturers' planned decisions after refusing the lecturers' sexual advances or demands. In the second theme, the participants felt distressed and experienced emotional reactions, including anxiety, depression, crying, and sleepless nights. The last theme shows how the victims developed distrust for men and some refused to approach men for help for fear of sexual harassment following their experiences. Recommendations were made on how to address this social problem.

Keywords: sextortion, sexual harassment, psychological impacts, lecturer, female students, academic, higher education institutions

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1. Introduction

Sextortion is a social problem in higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world. The term "sextortion" appears to mean different acts to different audiences in more recent times. Therefore, it is worth defining the term to guide the readers of this journal article more appropriately. An increasing number of organisations use the term sextortion to describe a form of online blackmail whereby someone threatens another person to expose their nude or sexual image with the purpose of extorting money from the latter or forcing the latter to do the former's bidding academics. It has also been observed that some academics have also used the term to describe such online blackmail (see Gámez-Guadix et al., 2022; Henry & Umbach, 2024; Notté, 2024; Wolak et al., 2018).

However, sextortion in this current journal article does not refer to such cyber activities, rather, the definition comes from the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) who coined this term in 2008 to describe "the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage" (IAWJ, n.d., p.19). The female judges analysed two separate incidents in two different continents – one involving Ugandan male prison guards demanding sex from female prisoners before they could deliver life-saving drugs to the latter and another case involving Central American male border officials demanding sex from female migrants heading to the southern border of the United States of America before they could enable them to cross any of the three borders (IAWJ, n.d.). The judges agreed that this practice was certainly "corrupt in the sense that the government official was trading on his entrusted authority for private gain" (IAWJ, n.d., p.14). The existing anti-corruption statutes according to the judges, specifically referred to cash or pecuniary advantages. Still, there was also what they described as "catch-all phrases such as 'a thing of value' – phrases that required further interpretation by courts and did not expressly reach this kind of sexual quid pro quo" (IAWJ, n.d., p.14). Thus, the judges coined the term "sextortion" to reflect both the sexual and corruption components of this practice.

The sexual component involves an implicit or explicit request to engage in some form of unwanted sexual activity while the corruption component refers to the fact that the person demanding the sexual activity must be an authority figure who abuses this authority by demanding sexual favour as a condition to provide a service (IAWJ, n.d.). Sextortion is also known as sexual corruption (see Coleman et al., 2024). Within sexual corruption, common expressions like "sex for grades or sex for jobs imply that sex is the starting point of the exchange" (Bjarnegård et al., 2024, p.1350). Bjarnegård et al. (2024) have suggested the three components whose involvements indicate sexual corruption or sextortion and these include abuse of authority, quid pro quo or this for that, and a sexual favour as the currency of the transaction.

These components were involved in the data analysed in this current journal article, which made the author present the incidents as sextortion. In all the cases, the victims were pressed by their lecturers to provide sexual favours for the latter's personal gain. Further, the sexual favours were based on "this" (sexual favour) for "that" (grade). This was a form of extortion involving sex as a currency. While the presence of sextortion in many HEIs can be found in several academic literature, the term "sextortion" can be hardly found in such literature because most of the authors adopt the term "sexual harassment" or "sexual violence". This has meant that the term "sexual harassment" will be widely used in the literature review and discussion sections of this current journal article because the right term, i.e., sextortion, hardly exists in the literature. In some of the literature, the acts are defined as "sex for marks" or "sex for grades", which presents it more clearly as sextortion but without using this term.

An undercover investigation by the BBC (2019) Africa Eye revealed the level of impunity and the threats that the students received from their lecturers. Although these cases are consistently described as sexual harassment, they indeed involved sextortion as the students were put under pressure by their lecturers who presented this as a condition for their success. This was also the case with dozens of other cases that have appeared in the media recently, including the highly publicised case of Monica Osagie who recorded her professor at the Obafemi Awolowo University demanding "five rounds of sex" before he could allow her to pass her assessment (see Adebayo & Busari, 2018); a student impregnated by her lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (see Uzodinma, 2021); a nursing student impregnated by her lecturer at the Ogun State College of Health Technology (see Folarin, 2017); and many more. These and numerous other cases that have been reported in media and academic literature are sextortion as authority figures (lecturers) aimed to gain sexual favour from their students before they could enable them to pass their assessments. The cases involved "this for that," which also makes quid pro quo relevant in these cases. Quid pro quo refers to refers to sexual harassment "committed when an employer, supervisor, manager or co-worker, undertakes or attempts to influence the process of recruitment, promotion, training, discipline, dismissal, salary increment or other benefit of an existing staff member or job applicant, in exchange for sexual favours" (International Labour Organisation, 2015).

The existing media and academic reports on sextortion (often described as sexual harassment) in Nigerian HEIs suggest that it negatively impacts the victims (see Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Udechukwu et al., 2020). Most of the existing studies on this phenomenon, however, adopted the quantitative approach, which did not allow for the voices of the victims to be heard. This calls for a qualitative study, which could enable the victims to narrate in their own words, the ways these unpleasant experiences had affected them. While some media reports have included the voices of the victims, they were simply the victims' narratives. Therefore, the current study aims to analyse both the first-hand accounts of the victims of sextortion gathered through semi-structured interviews participants' accounts published by the media.

2. Sextortion and Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions

Available evidence suggests that sextortion (often described as "sex for grades") in Nigerian institutions "cuts across public, private and faith-based institutions, regardless of the geographical locations" (Akpambang, 2021, p.31). However, some studies have suggested that this is more prevalent in public institutions compared to private ones. For example, Ijitona et al.'s (2018) study found that the prevalence varied between 11 percent in private institutions and 27 percent in public institutions. It can be argued that the owners of private institutions are more likely to act against perpetrators than those managing public institutions since the former institutions are private businesses run for profit. However, this is not always the case. As will be seen in the later part of this subheading, other empirical studies on the prevalence of this problem in both private and public HEIs in Nigeria did not show much difference.

Sextortion of students takes different forms; it may start as financial exploitation (i.e., a demand for a monetary bribe) and end up as sexual exploitation. For example, while male lecturers financially exploit male students outright, the former may ask female students to pay cash as the first option and while they cannot afford the cash, sex might be demanded as a second option. However, some lecturers insist that female students must offer both sex and cash (see Agazue, 2023). This is what Sundström & Wängnerud (2021, p.3) describe as a "double cost" while discussing how border officials asked male migrants to pay cash while requesting cash and sex from female migrants.

In 2014, the Exam Ethics Marshals International (EEMI) found that Nigerian students in tertiary institutions lost no less than 50 billion Naira to extortion as students spent between 25,000 and 50,000 per academic session on extortion (Onyechere, 2018). The report also shows that no less than 200,000 female students were victims of sextortion per academic session as of 2014. Onyechere (2018) noted that these figures have increased significantly in more recent times. This would be expected considering the current hyperinflation in the country.

Several empirical studies have been conducted in Nigeria on the issues of rape, sexual harassment, and abuse of female students by male lecturers. However, most of these cases involved sextortion but the term itself did not feature in any of these studies. In Ijitona et al.'s (2018, p.20) study of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape of female students in polytechnics in five states in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, they found that male lecturers did this "to exercise their power and authority over the female students". While rape and sexual assault are well-defined crimes in their own right, the rest that was presented as sexual harassment appeared to be sextortion. The exercise of power and authority indicates sextortion because these were authority figures demanding sexual favour from those under them for personal gain. This is also the case with numerous studies on this social problem in Nigeria, which are almost always described as sexual harassment. However, the studies on this phenomenon often include different perpetrators and some of them are not those in a position of authority (e.g., peers or coursemates). Some of these incidents were sexual harassment. However, greater attention will be paid to incidents involving lecturers and students, which qualify as sextortion.

Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo's (2010) study found that up to 69.8 percent of their 398 respondents had experienced sexual harassment in different forms – 65.3 percent experienced non-physical types while 48.2 percent experienced the physical types. They investigated different perpetrators and found lecturers to be the perpetrators in 59.7 percent of cases and that 29.1 percent of the incidents took place in lecturers' offices. This study can be said to be representative of most Nigerian female students despite the low sample because the participants were female graduates participating in the mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme at the time. Graduates undertaking the NYSC programme are posted to different states of the federation from different institutions. Further, the participants included graduates of universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, and the findings suggest that the menace was equally present in those types of institutions. Ogbonnaya et al.'s (2011) study of sexual victimisation in Ebonyi State University found that 36.7 percent of their 295 participants (female students) had experienced sexual victimisation on their campuses. Slightly over 26 percent of the participants indicated that they knew other victims of sexual victimisation on their campuses. Perpetrators of these offences included lecturers, non-academic staff and coursemates. Lecturers were the perpetrators in 39.8 percent of the cases.

Ijitona et al. (2018) investigated sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape of female students in polytechnics in five states in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. Unlike other studies discussed above that focused on multiple perpetrators, Ijitona et al.'s (2018) study focused solely on lecturers as perpetrators. They found that upto 38 percent of the 1,800 female students in the study had experienced sexual violence. This study involved both private and public institutions with private institutions showing lower rate compared to public institutions as indicated in the first paragraph of this subheading. Ogunfowokan et al.'s (2023) study is one of the recent ones in this field. The study involved 167 students and it found that 2.6 percent of the students reported rape, 12.3 percent reported attempted rape, while 16.1 reported sexual harassment. It is worth stating that the participants in this study involved both male and female victims and Ogunfowokan et al. did not break the figures down based on gender. Having said this, as these are gender-based offences with females consistently featured as the predominant victims, it can be argued that the majority of the victims were female students. While the sample of this study was small, it has some other strengths, such as the involvement of up to 4 institutions, random selection to ensure that students from different tribes participated, although this did not mean equal representation of the tribes, as this did not seem practicable.

Akpambang's (2021) study on this issue focused on private (faith-based) universities only. Three of these institutions were studied, which were represented as A, B and C. The study found that in A, 41.5 percent (200 victims), B, 50.1 (197 victims) percent and C, 41.6 percent (124 victims) experienced sexual harassment. These figures align with the ones above obtained from public HEIs, suggesting that prevalence rates do not always differ between private and public institutions as suggested by Ijitona et al.'s (2018) study.

Agazue (2023) has argued that the high incidences of sexual victimisation of female students in HEIs across the country and also the reluctance of the authorities of certain HEIs in the country to tackle this problem, are connected to the endemic corruption and the power asymmetry that characterise the country. He argues that the sexual harassment and exploitation of female students by male lecturers reflect the power distance in Nigerian society where a calibre of those in authority do not have much regard for those under them. While sexual victimisation in HEIs is a social problem around the world, Nigerian cases are alarming. While there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Nigerian cases are the most severe in the world, the impunity with which Nigerian lecturers pick on innocent students, demand sex from them and boldly threaten them with fail if the latter reject the advances is a testament to the "culture of corruption" in the country. These particular lecturers, in certain institutions, repeat these same acts with too many students year after year, ensuring that the students fail yet the culprits face no consequences, enabling them to continue to prey on new victims. This is facilitated by corruption where authorities hardly act when they are expected to act.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that many lecturers, including prominent professors, have been suspended, sacked, arrested, prosecuted and even jailed for these offences (see Agazue, 2023a; Bamigbola, 2018; Brisibe, 2016; Ekott, 2019; Premium Times, 2016; Vanguard, 2022). While some institutions are proactive in tackling this problem, it seems that many institutions only react when pressure intensifies or in the public interest, especially when their victims make their evidence public, such as public sharing of audio or video recordings of incidents. The case of Dr Boniface Igbeneghu of the University of Lagos dismissed following a documentary by BBC (2019) Africa Eye and Professor Richard Akindele of Obafemi Awolowo University sacked and prosecuted following the release of audio recording of sextortion by his victim in 2018, are two very popular examples in recent years. There have been similar cases in some other HEIs in recent years. These institutions should be more proactive in tackling this menace.

3. Theoretical Discussion

Both sextortion and sexual harassment have something in common, which is gaining an unwanted sexual advantage over another person. Further, both acts are most often perpetrated by men against female targets. In other words, they are gendered phenomena whose effects on the victims could be similar. As a result, existing theories of sexual harassment can explain sextortion. As this journal article focuses on the psychological impacts of these experiences, the focus here, therefore, is on a theory that can explain how this act impacts the victims. The integrated model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) is considered relevant to this. Although this theory can explain why sexual harassment occurs, it also delves into the impacts of this act on the victims. The integrated model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) is so-called because it acknowledges that sexual harassment involves more than one element. Fitzgerald et al. identify two factors, which are "organizational climate and job gender context". In terms of organisational context, organisations may tolerate sexual harassment based on their characteristics. Job gender context refers to the gendered nature of workers and the nature of tasks and duties they perform. Fitzgerald et al. hypothesised that the two aforementioned elements determine how sexual harassment functions in any particular organisations, noting that sexual harassment negatively affects job outcomes (e.g., "job satisfaction and organisational withdrawal") and also psychological (e.g., "stress-related reactions such as anxiety and depression") and health-related outcomes (e.g., "headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, and sleep disturbance").

Fitzgerald et al. (1997) tested their integrated model on 357 women in non-traditional female jobs and found that levels of sexual harassment were significantly higher in male-dominated organisations. They found that women who experienced sexual harassment experienced more psychological problems, higher levels of absenteeism, and took more time thinking about quitting their jobs compared to women who did not experience sexual harassment. Fitzgerald et al. (1997) also found that higher levels of sexual harassment were associated with higher levels of psychological distress and higher levels of sexual experience were associated with lower job satisfaction. They found that women in organisations where sexual harassment was tolerated, i.e., where complaints by victims are not taken seriously, where perpetrators were unlikely to be punished, and where targets believed that it was risky

for them to complain, experienced "considerably higher levels of harassment". This supports the idea that sexual harassment is legitimised by organisational culture (see Livholts et al., 2024).

Fitzgerald et al.'s (1997) theory has been tested widely and in different contexts and with different research designs, and the theory has mostly received support. Fitzgerald et al. (1999) applied this theory to sexual harassment in the military involving over 28,000 military personnel and found that the experience of sexual harassment was related to negative attitudes towards one's job, lowered health satisfaction and poor psychological wellbeing. They also found that sexual harassment occurred less frequently in workgroups that appeared more gender-balanced and also organisations where the managers were less likely to tolerate such behaviour. Glomb et al. (1999) conducted their study on 217 women using longitudinal models of harassment and found that sexual harassment influenced work-related variables, such as job satisfaction, job withdrawal, and work withdrawal. They also found that sexual harassment influenced psychological outcomes, including distress, life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

While the integrated model is an interesting framework for understanding sexual harassment, it focuses on workplace-based sexual harassment. Fitzgerald et al. (1997) proposed it with the workplace in mind and they were able to connect it to the organisational environment. Sexual harassment occurs in many contexts, including domestic and academic settings and this theory is able to explain sexual harassment in these settings. Therefore, the integrated model appears relevant to this current journal article that focuses on sexual harassment and sextortion in academic environments because even though these acts are not limited to the workplace, some of the impacts are similar irrespective of the particular setting where victimisation occurred. Therefore, this model can explain the effects of these acts on the student victims discussed in this current journal article. As will be seen in the analysis section of this current report, the two factors (i.e., organizational climate and job gender context) that Fitzgerald et al. identify as contributing to sexual harassment apply to the current data because it seems that the tolerance of sexual harassment in many Nigerian HEIs contribute to the increasing experiences of sexual harassment. While the victims were not employees, invalidating the term "job" in the second factor, "gender context" still applies because it is the gender of the victims in such an environment that makes female students targets in the hands of male lecturers.

Some of Fitzgerald et al.'s (1997) findings, particularly the prevalence of sexual harassment in traditionally male-dominated jobs, can be better explained within the notion of "patriarchal operations". Across many histories and cultures, it is customary for men to approach women to discuss sexual matters. In fact, in some societies, it is taboo for a woman to approach a man to discuss such matters. Such universal tradition has positioned men as the initiators of conversations surrounding sex or sexual relationships. Unfortunately, not all men are gentlemen; while some men approach women to discuss sexual or relationship matters in a dignified manner, others resort to harassment. Gender norms "legitimise sexual harassment by normalising a sexualising jargon, and threats and fear keep gender norms in place" (Livholts et al., 2024).

As women tend to be overrepresented in certain job contexts where sexual harassment and sextortion commonly occurs as well as being the targets, sexual harassment has been identified as part of the "ongoing sexism" in certain professions (Lu et al., 2020). In the integrated model, Fitzgerald et al. (1997) acknowledge the "job gender context" as contributing to sexual harassment. Cuenca-Piqueras et al.'s (2023) review shows that the growing research interest in sexual harassment takes on a gender perspective. While Lu et al. drew on the experiences of nurses in healthcare environments where female nurses consisted 83.87% of the entire 32,970 subjects in their analysis, several other studies in this current article also show that women account for the vast majority of workers in work environments characterised by sexual harassment where they were also the targets, including entertainment industry (Gaal, 2020; Hennekam & Bennett, 2017; Korzec, 2006; Samuel-Okon, 2024), hospitality/tourism industry (Chela-Alvarez et al., 2024; Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Jung & Yoon, 2020; Kensbock et al., 2015; Mensah, 2022; Nimri et al., 2020), and others.

In addition to women having more population in many industries where sexual harassment occurs, "gendered power relations" in such industries are also notable. For example, men are usually of higher status than women in such industries and although the equality principles seem to be changing in recent times, there is still a long way to go in some industries before the population of women could equal men's. With creative industries as an example, Hennekam & Bennett (2017) show how their research participants disclosed gendered power relations involving gallery owners, producers, editors and more, "all of whom had the power to decide who would receive work". The power to decide who should or should not work in these industries puts female workers at the mercy

of the men's intrusive behaviours. This can also explain why sexual harassment is said to be "a symptom of social inequalities" (Burn, 2019).

Domestic work is another area where sexual harassment is commonplace due to the gendered nature of such jobs and the social inequality between the employer and the domestic servant or between the employer's family and the domestic worker. Employer's family is considered here because in some cases, the employer could be a woman, but the domestic worker would be sexually harassed by the employer's male partner or son. Papadakaki et al. (2021) found this to be the case among their research participants in four European countries (Austria, Cyprus, Greece, and Sweden). The participants were mostly treated by their employers or the families as if they were sexual property – even some of the employers that the domestic workers considered nice ended up sexually harassing or assaulting the worker. This was probably due to the common belief that the domestic worker should be ready to offer sexual services when needed. Such situations can also be explained by the integrated model (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) due to the acknowledgement of the nature of duties and tasks women perform. Domestic work is mostly performed by women. Social inequality also seems obvious as those who can afford domestic services are likely to be relatively wealthy while the domestic worker is likely to be within the working class or underclass status although there are exceptions.

Although a low population of women in certain jobs is believed to contribute to sexual harassment in the workplace as previously discussed (see Fitzgerald et al., 1997), should we assume that an equal population of men and women or a higher population of women in the workplace will keep them safe from harassment? While more research is needed to be able to answer this question, evidence from other contexts suggests that this might not be the case. For example, Bondestam & Lundqvist's (2020) systematic review shows that sexual harassment experiences in HEIs "varies between 11 and 73 per cent for heterosexual women (median 49 per cent) and between 3 and 26 per cent for heterosexual men (median 15 per cent)". Similarly, Athanasiades et al.'s (2023) study of sexual harassment among 2,134 university students, found that female students experienced much higher rates of incidences (over 80%) of obscene gestures, obscene staring, exposure of body parts, unwanted touching or kissing, and unwanted insistence for a date, drinks or sex. Although the population of female students might be lower than males' in some institutions or departments, this is not always the case in all institutions where more women experience sexual harassment. In certain societies, more females attend HEIs than males.

Further, if one attempts to explain the higher female exposure based on gendered power relations (i.e., male lecturers targeting female students), one also needs to consider the fact that female students are also harassed by their male coursemates who are often not of higher positions than the former. It seems that the higher experiences of sexually harassing incidents by women could be a result of gender norms whereby men consider it right to approach women for sexual matters, including in sexually harassing ways. Catherine MacKinnon's work as observed by Anderson (2006), presents sexual harassment as "sexual conduct that men impose on women because they are women". Sexual harassment is described as an "unpleasant and unavoidable part" of women's working lives (Otto, 1997). Based on the outcome of their study on sexual harassment in HEIs involving both male and female students, Athanasiades et al. (2023) stated that "female gender per se is a predictive factor for experiencing sexual harassment". Being female in itself increases the chances that one would be sexually harassed in a HEI environment (Wood et al., 2021). In a study involving more than 50,000 university students in the United States, Wood et al. (2021) found that sexual harassment incidents perpetrated by staff members identified as male were 78 percent compared to only 15 percent of incidents by those identified as females.

4. Psychological Impacts of Sextortion and Sexual Harassment

Both sextortion and sexual harassment have sexual victimisation elements and this might suggest that their impacts might be similar if not the same. Further, many studies involving sextortion are presented as studies of sexual harassment. This is probably due to the sexual victimisation elements of these experiences. This also suggests that many researchers are yet to separate sextortion incidents from sexual harassment widely. As a result of this, studies involving both sextortion and sexual harassment will be reviewed together below to offer better insights into the impacts of these sexual offences.

According to Houle et al. (2011), an "important unanswered question is whether harassment has long-term consequences for mental health and well-being". Interestingly, many studies have sought to offer the answers to this important question. Research has shown not only that sexual harassment has both short- and long-term

impacts on the victims (Anwar et al., 2019; Stockdale et al., 2009), but the impacts vary from low degree to average degree and high degree (Hutagalung & Ishak, 2012). An empirical study of sexual harassment victimisation among college women found that they experienced self-blame, loss of self-esteem, emptiness, fear, sense of guilt, discomfort, disgust, distress, depression, dissociative episode, and lack of concentration (Rosenthal & Freyd, 2022). Ogbonnaya et al.'s (2011) study of sexual victimisation among female undergraduates in Nigeria found that 89.8 percent of their 295 participants reported psychosocial distress.

Similarly, Madani et al.'s (2023) study of sexual harassment of female university students in Pakistan found that it led to distrust, restlessness, insomnia, depression, guilt, low self-esteem, poor confidence, fear of men, suspicion of men, avoiding people, limiting interactions with people, difficulty continuing education, and attempted suicide. Nigerian female university students reported depression and feelings of unequal treatment (Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010). More recent studies of Nigerian female university students found that sexual harassment victimisation on campus was linked to fear, low self-esteem, difficulties with interpersonal relationships (Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016), stress, depression, a sense of looseness, shame, guilt, stomach problem, humiliation, anxiety, panic, increased blood pressure, ostracism from friends and colleagues, unwanted pregnancy, illegal abortion, and loss of womb (Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017). Another set of female victims in Nigerian universities in another study reported loss of self-worth, loss of integrity, sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancy (Udechukwu et al., 2020). Nigerian cases most often involve sextortion, which is often described as sexual harassment.

Gyawali & Karki (2023) studied the impacts of sexual harassment on female university students and found that the experience led to fear, anxiety and low self-esteem in the victims. Similar findings were also reported by Gyawali & Maharjan (2022). A student in Gyawali & Maharjan's (2022) qualitative study described how her body would tremble once the harassing teacher entered the classroom. Gyawali (2021) investigated the effects of sexual harassment on mental health among 773 female students in India and found that depression was among the symptoms they reported. Gyawali (2021) compared their participants who experienced sexual harassment with those who did not experience it and found that the prevalence of depression was 45 percent in the former while only 16 percent in the latter. Klein & Martin (2021) found that student victims of sexual harassment "faced a variety of mental and physical health consequences". Bondestam & Lundqvist's (2020) systematic review of literature on sexual harassment in HEIs found that it has too many psychological impacts, including depression, anxiety, anger, discomfort, stress, irritation, PTSD, and more. Again, many instances of sexual victimisation in HEIs in different parts of the world involve lecturers as perpetrators and students as victims, which makes this sextortion. However, it should be acknowledged that some studies also consider other perpetrators, such as peers and more, which might qualify as sexual harassment.

Chela-Alvarez et al.'s (2024) study of sexual harassment of hotel housekeepers in Balearic Islands found that the victims suffered from poor health, high levels of work-related stress and low satisfaction with the job. However, this study investigated experiences of sexual harassment alongside workplace bullying. Thus, it was difficult to be certain about which of the experiences that contributed to which impacts. Nevertheless, an earlier study by Hutagalung & Ishak (2012) that focused on sexual harassment only, reported findings that were similar to Chela-Alvarez et al.'s (2024). The former was based on surveys conducted on 1,423 female employees of higher education institutes in Malaysia who were sexually harassed by male colleagues. Hutagalung & Ishak (2012) found that the participants experienced sexual harassment in three different degrees (low, average, and high) and that these experiences led to a decrease in job satisfaction and an increase in work-related stress. Hutagalung & Ishak reported differences based on the length of service, between younger and older employees, and also single and married employees. Willness et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis of 41 studies involving about 70,000 participants shows that sexual harassment was associated with poor organisational commitment, decreased job satisfaction, withdrawal from the job, symptoms of PTSD, and mental and physical health problems. Lim and Cortina (2005) found that sexual harassment led to a decline in the wellbeing of the female employees who witnessed it. Anwar et al. (2019) found that the Pakistani female victims of sexual harassment in public places they studied reported that the experiences affected their jobs and studies negatively and also led to them contemplating quitting their jobs or studies. This finding is particularly interesting as it indicates that sexual harassment experienced outside of one's workplace or study environment could lead to the victim losing interest in their job or study.

The low satisfaction with the job reported by Chela-Alvarez et al. (2024), Hutagalung & Ishak's (2012), and Willness et al. (2007) can be partly explained by Fitzgerald et al.'s (1997) findings (integrated model of sexual harassment) that sexual harassment is connected to high levels of absenteeism and thoughts about quitting the job. It could be argued that the low satisfaction with the job caused by experiences of sexual harassment might

have led to absenteeism and thoughts about quitting the job. Chela-Alvarez et al.'s (2024) and Hutagalung & Ishak's (2012) research participants also reported high levels of work-related stress. Again, such stress could motivate absenteeism and dissatisfaction with the job.

Jung & Yoon (2020) found that experiences of sexual harassment of deluxe hotel employees they studied led to low psychological safety and burnout in the victims. However, this can be argued to be context specific. Since burnout syndrome is an on-the-job experience that is also connected to repeated exposure to a stressful situation, the experience of burnout might not apply to victims of sexual harassment who are not employees of the organisations where they were sexually harassed, such as hotel guests harassed by other guests, passengers harassed inside vehicles, students harassed by teachers and more. In the work environment, sexual harassment is a chronic stressor that puts the victim under physical and mental stress frequently (Houle et al., 2011). It makes interactions at the workplace both uncomfortable and difficult (Houle et al., 2011), and could also force victims to withdraw or quit the job (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Glomb et al., 1999; Houle et al., 2011; Willness et al., 2007). Thus, burnout in such an environment is likely when the unpleasant experience becomes persistent. Social harassment in a work setting could result in increased stress, job dissatisfaction, and inefficiency (Lu et al., 2020).

Houle et al. (2011) investigated the psychological impacts of sexual harassment in the work environment and came up with different findings. They found that the sexual harassment was positively associated with depressive affect in their adult participants. Houle et al. used both quantitative and qualitative data. In their qualitative data, participants described their feelings following their harassment experiences and these included self-doubt; self-blame; loss of self-esteem; feeling angry with the harasser; being suspicious of people; being conscious of bad people around oneself; and being less tolerant of harassment. Mushtaq et al. (2015) investigated the link between sexual harassment and negative mental health in 200 female nurses in India and found a significant correlation between sexual harassment and anxiety, depression and stress.

It has been observed that some factors may moderate the psychological impacts of sexual harassment. While victims of sexual harassment may experience post-traumatic stress, for instance, perpetrator characteristics (e.g., race; status) may moderate such effects (see Woods et al., 2009). The perpetrator's status has also been found to affect the victim's affective states; the victim's affective states were more negative when the harasser was perceived as being of low status (Littler-Bishop et al., 1982). In Houle et al.'s (2011) study, non-White victims and females reported higher levels of depressive affect and cohabiting and married individuals reported lower levels of depressive affect. Some of these findings support those of Hutagalung & Ishak (2012) who reported differences based on the length of service, age, and marital status. Uzzaman et al. (2021) found that age and marital status were significantly associated with fear of sexual harassment among female garment workers in Bangladesh. Athanasiades et al. (2023) found that the perceived consequences of sexual harassment were stronger when resilience was lower.

Stockdale et al. (2009) found a statistically significant relationship between the experiences of sexual harassment and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Having considered their participants' prior experiences of trauma and abuse, they found that "experiencing sexual harassment was independently associated with PTSD symptoms" and that the experience was severe enough for an independent diagnosis of PTSD. However, they note that experience of PTSD was unlikely in victims of less serious forms of sexual harassment. Other individual characteristics that may moderate the impacts of sexual harassment include gender, mental health condition before the harassment, prior sexual harassment (Houle et al., 2011) and pervasiveness of harassment (Langhout et al., 2005). Collinsworth et al. (2009) have studied several factors relating to victims' outcomes, including severity, frequency, perpetrator power, attributions, previous victimisation, self-blame, and more. These factors influenced victims' outcomes to varying degrees. They found that the severity of the victims' experience was the most prominent factor when it came to "psychic damage". They found that overall, victim attributions and harassment severity were the strongest predictors of psychological distress with severity exerting its influence mostly on PTSD symptoms while attributions were the most influential for global distress.

Sexual harassment has also been linked to eating disorders. Harned & Fitzgerald (2002) studied this link using data from 3 samples which included 472 military women, 254 military men, and 1,853 women involved in a class-action sexual harassment lawsuit. They found a positive association between sexual harassment and eating disorders among the military women and the women in a class-action sexual harassment lawsuit. Their findings were gender specific as they did not find a positive relationship between sexual harassment and eating disorders in men as was the case with women. Harned & Fitzgerald also found that the effects of sexual harassment on

eating disorders among the female participants were mediated by several variables, including psychological distress, self-esteem and self-blame.

5. Methods

5.1 Research Design

The qualitative research paradigm was adopted for this current article. The qualitative approach emphasises meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Willig, 2013). Thus, it is indispensable when there is a need to understand the complexities of human behaviour that require answers to "why" and "how" questions (Lakshman et al., 2000). The existing studies on the phenomenon of sextortion often called sexual harassment in Nigeria are mostly based on quantitative research (Agazue, 2023) and this means that much is not known about the different ways this social problem affects the victims. Thus, the current research aimed to explore this with linguistic data to allow the participants to provide a detailed account of how they were affected by this problem.

5.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Both primary data and secondary data were used in this current study. Primary data were chosen because the researcher needed first-hand accounts of the phenomenon from individuals who were the real victims of this menace. Two sampling techniques were adopted in this current study and these are purposive sampling and snowball sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher targets a certain network (Barratt et al., 2015) based on the purpose of the study and the researcher's belief that the members of that network have the "largest potential" for providing insights into the phenomenon of interest (Palys, 2008, p.698). Thus, a group of female undergraduates and graduates who had experienced sexual harassment in the hands of male lecturers in different HEIs in the southeastern part of Nigeria were purposively recruited. Snowball sampling refers to "a special nonprobability method for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances" (Anieting & Mosugu, 2017, p.34). This sampling method is widely used by qualitative researchers when their research involves a hard-to-reach population (Heckathorn, 2011). Snowball sampling was adopted because the researcher did not know enough victims to recruit. Thus, he relied on some of the victims to refer him to other victims they knew if they felt comfortable with this request. Some of them were happy to refer the researcher to their friends and coursemates.

The research data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, questions are predetermined and phrased in a way to enable responses that tap into a particular topic area (Longhurst, 2016). This method of interview was chosen to enable the researcher to phrase questions in a way that would enable the participants to explain the impacts of sexual harassment in depth (see appendix). A total of 15 participants (aged 18 to 29) took part in the interviews. The participants were all women comprising graduates and undergraduates of different HEIs. The participants came from a total of 8 institutions consisting of 5 universities and 3 polytechnics.

Secondary data were collected from media reports. While academic reports containing qualitative accounts of the victims of this social problem are scanty, some students have narrated their experiences to newsagents who published them in different news outlets. This provided the researcher with resources to collaborate on the first-hand accounts he received from the victims. The secondary data contained accounts of victims in other regions of the country, unlike the primary data that focused on the experiences of the victims in the southeastern part of the country only. The secondary data were used for triangulation purposes – to see if the experiences outside southeastern institutions followed similar patterns to those reported in the interviews. The secondary data came from a total of 4 media outlets, and these included the Punch (cited as Folarin, 2017), Legit (cited as Shalom, 2023), Lawyers Alert (cited as Innocent, 2019) and University World News (cited as Deji-Folutile, 2024). The researcher selected media articles not older than 10 years to ensure that the incidents were current.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

As a UK-based psychology researcher, the current researcher adhered to ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) in its Code of Human Research Ethics throughout the fieldwork and the drafting process. The interviews were recorded with a Lenovo tablet with the participants' permission. Although this device was owned and accessed by the researcher only, he ensured to protect it with a password to protect the electronic data in case of loss or theft. The purpose of the research, the reasons for choosing the participants, and all other relevant information were provided to the participants before the interviews. Their consent was

sought and obtained before their participation. It was made known to the participants that their words would be published as part of a journal article but without their names and any other personal details they would provide. Thus, their real names were replaced with pseudonyms. Some of the participants mentioned the names of several victims of these offences (such as their coursemates); they also mentioned the names of the institutions where the incidents took place; and in some cases, the lecturers' names were also mentioned. However, the researcher removed all these personal details and those relating to certain institutions during the analysis in line with the BPS Code on confidentiality.

The researcher also considered the issue of "harm". While there was no physical harm as the research involved only interviews, the researcher considered the possibility of "psychological harm". This was due to the recognition that the experience was generally distressing. The researcher then considered the possibility that recalling such unpleasant experiences might upset some victims. Therefore, he observed the participants carefully during the interviews should any of them show signs of psychological breakdown. He planned to terminate the interview should this happen in addition to referring the participants to a psychological organisation for psychological support. Fortunately, the participants felt strong.

5.4 Data Analysis Method: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used for the analysis of the current data. IPA is defined by the pioneers of the approach, Smith & Osborn (2015) as "a qualitative approach which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience". IPA "is concerned with how participants are engaged in a search for the meaning of their experiences" (Smith, 2018). Smith (2018) describes human beings as "sense making creatures" or "sense making agents" who, unlike non-human animals, are capable of engaging in self-reflection regarding their experiences. In other words, humans make sense of what has happened to them. As Smith (2018) noted, "what turns an event into an experience is the significance bestowed on it by the human participating in, and potentially changed by, what is happening" (Smith, 2018). These were evident in the current data, making IPA the most suitable analytic method for the data. The current participants made sense of their experiences of extortion. They reflected on these experiences and what they meant to them. They were not only extorted sexually, rather, but the experiences had also changed them in some ways. It was their self-reflection of these experiences that led to them realising that it was not simply a case of a request by a lecturer to engage in sexual activities before they could pass, rather, the request and/or the activities ended up changing the participants' views about the world, creating fear in them, and causing them distress. IPA can be used for past or ongoing experiences (Smith, 2018). Again, this made IPA suitable for the current data as the participants in the study included graduates who experienced sextortion in the past couple of years and also undergraduates whose experiences were ongoing at the time of the research fieldwork. Media reports contained incidents that occurred some years ago while interview data contained both current and ongoing experiences.

6. Analysis and Discussion

The data analysed under this subheading contained only the experiences that qualified as sextortion based on the definitions of sextortion provided in the introductory section of this current journal article. The analysis of the current data revealed that the female students who were sexually extorted by their lecturers experienced psychological problems as a result. They reported different types of impacts on them, and these were presented under three different themes, which are "Living in fear"; "Feeling distressed"; and "Distrust of men". Data relating to each of these themes was analysed in depth and verbatim quotes from the interviews were used as evidence of the impacts of sextortion on the victims.

6.1 Living in fear

The above theme was developed because the participants' words indicated that they lived in fear of the outcomes of their meetings with their lecturers after refusing the lecturer's sexual advances or not giving the lecturer an immediate response. They were mostly worried about the outcomes of their assessments, suspecting that the lecturer might decide to fail them out of revenge for rejecting his sexual advances or for not accepting the sexual demand outright.

> I started fearing that I would not make it in that course you know and cos of that I keep on praying. My fear increased. I started panicking and had this fear for long after this whole thing [i.e., after her lecturer demanded sex]. This was disturbing me … When he saw me, he was just looking at me

> like maybe you have rejected me or so. … I think he got tired and didn't ask me again. I passed that course well (Ijay).
>
> You know the way he started saying things and his body language started changing. We got worried and all that. … He started saying those that have not seen him, those that are forming they know it all, those kind of thing. And you're really worried and wondering (Cheta).

Ijay's words "I would not make it in that course" suggest that the outcome of her result was the source of her fear. The fear later increased. Similarly, Cheta got "worried and wondering" as she might have felt that she could fail for not seeing their lecturer as per the lecturer's statement about "those that have not seen him". Although Ijay lived in fear of failing her course and resorted to praying about it, she was honest in saying that the lecturer did not punish her with failure for not complying with his demands. This suggests that even though students might suspect that their success depended on consenting to sex as demanded by the lecturer, some lecturers did not see it this way. Perhaps some lecturers wanted carnal knowledge of their students but did not present this as a condition for the student's success.

Another participant named Martha described her fears and frustration after she refused to accept her project supervisor's sexual advances. As previously established by existing literature on this subject, supervision of dissertation projects is one of the factors bringing students closer to their lecturers, leading to irresponsible lecturers demanding sex from their students as a condition to supervise the students (see Agazue, 2023). This was the case with Martha. Her supervisor had already lost interest in supervising her after Martha declined his demand for sex, making Martha to live in fear:

> You're meant to correct me with my work but you're now telling me another thing – that you like me, that if I should just accept, then you do this one and do that one. Then you come back. … I came to his office, he told me he's busy. That we should stop talking about projects that he was telling me that he likes me. … I was just calm. I don't want to shout. … I was just that scared because I don't know what he could do after all that. I was so frustrated (Martha).

The last participant under this theme described her "battle" with her project supervisor who could not stop demanding sex from her and her fears as follows:

> Later on, he found out that I was on my period. He was very mad at me that I started apologising. After that, the next day, I went to his office and begged him. He now listened to me and fixed another date for me. He was now asking when my period will finish. He then fixed another date for me but that day, I did not go. I told him that something came up and I travelled. I lied to him that my grandmother died. … But then he still fixed another date. I can even show you my WhatsApp chat with him. I was like if I don't do that thing [sex], I might get another carryover or I don't know. I was so worried. I lived in fear (Makasin).

Again, Martha's words that "I don't know what he could do after all that" and Makasin's words that "I might get another carryover" both indicate that their fears were connected to the outcome of their assessments as was the case with Ijay and Cheta discussed previously.

Several cases of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs that have appeared in the media also suggest that the victims lived in fear, which also contributed to them agreeing to the sexual demands of their lecturers. For example, Deji-Folutile (2024) described on the University World News a comment made by a female student victim of sextortion on X, which indicates the student's fear of the unknown after she rejected her lecturer's request to take her out:

> He swore to deal with me and began to mark me down in all his courses. To make matters worse, he was again named my project supervisor. I was confused and afraid and wanted to go and meet him at his office to cry and beg him, but I held myself back (Deji-Folutile, 2024).

Although this victim was able to hold herself back at last, she was afraid initially just like other students who lived in fear of the consequences of their lecturers' next actions once the former rejected sexual advances or demands. In the highly publicised case of a nursing student of the Ogun State College of Health Technology impregnated by her lecturer, the student explained to the media (Punch) why she eventually agreed to have sex with the lecturer:

> When I got to second semester, 300 level, he awarded me 38 in one of his courses. I went to his office in August 2016 to know why I failed the course. I needed to pass all my courses to be able to go for my board exam. He asked me if I thought I could just come to the school and go like that. He said if I dated him, he would waive the course. … (Folarin, 2017).

The lecturer had already failed the student deliberately so that the student would approach him for solutions. The student eventually approached the lecturer who came up with dating him as a solution. It did not appear that this lady dated the lecturer from her heart, rather, it was possible that the fear of failing again forced her to date the lecturer and this is reflected in her words below: "I told Adu that I would date him, … I didn't want to have any problem" (Folarin, 2017).

The above experiences of the current participants support those found in existing reports on the link between sexual harassment and fear (Anwar et al., 2019; Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Gyawali, 2021; Gyawali & Karki, 2023). About 72 percent of 279 Nigerian undergraduate victims of sexual harassment in Farinloye & Omobuwa's (2016) study reported fear. Anwar et al. (2019) found that the Pakistani female victims of sexual harassment felt scared and afraid of what could happen next. The current study is consistent with these previous studies as the current participants were afraid of what would happen, that is, suspecting that their lecturers might fail them for not accepting their sexual advances.

Nevertheless, Anwar et al.'s (2019) study was not concerned with academic environments but public places. Likewise, the participants' fears also differed; while the current participants lived in fear of their lecturers' decisions, Anwar et al.'s participants might be worried about what the perpetrators might do next, such as sexually or physically assaulting the former. Both studies indicate that the experience of sexual harassment does not always end right away with the harassment encounter, rather, the victim might live in fear of whatever they suspect the perpetrator could do next. In Gyawali's (2021) study, 86 percent of their 773 student participants in India lived in fear following sexual harassment or sextortion by their teachers. Although Gyawali's participants were students who described their experiences with their teachers, the experiences they described also included sexual harassment by friends, peers, neighbours and relatives.

6.2 Feeling distressed

In addition to living in fear, some of the participants also became distressed after refusing to agree to their lecturers' request for sex. Fear and distress are connected but they are presented separately because distress involves more emotional responses. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2018) in its dictionary of psychology defines distress as "the negative stress response, often involving negative affect and physiological reactivity". The National Cancer Institute (n.d.) defines distress as follows: "Emotional, social, spiritual, or physical pain or suffering that may cause a person to feel sad, afraid, depressed, anxious, or lonely". These definitions capture the experiences of the research participants analysed under this theme.

> That man gave me hard time. I really suffered. This man did not allow me to enjoy my time there [university]. He was all over me all the time and said I will not pass this course without that [i.e., sexual activity]. I was distressed and every time I would be crying (Susanna).

> I was really depressed. I was like which kind problem have I entered now? Why me naa? Why is it him? Why is he the person that is supervising me? What have I really done wrong to find myself in this condition now? (Merit).

> I was down! During that my project, I was down. I wasn't really myself because of those harassment and frustration. … It was when my result came out and that other lecturer approached me and told me "Congratulations!" That boosted my morale. I was just so happy! So happy! (Priscila).

> That particular one, that thing he did [i.e., threat] really affected me seriously like at a point, I gave up [i.e., accepting the sexual demand due to fear of failure]. Yes, it really affected me. It affected my life a lot (Dimma).

The sources of distress to the students varied. For Susanna, for instance, the "hard time" her lecturer gave her and the time that he did not allow her to enjoy on the campus contributed to her distress. Crying indicates that this was indeed a serious matter that involved physiological arousal in Susanna. Merit described herself as "really depressed" while Priscila described herself as "down". These terms suggest that the experiences of these

victims were beyond average stress levels that people encounter in their daily lives. The participants' accounts also suggest that their distress came from multiple sources; the term "hard time" by Susanna indicates inconvenience associated with the harassment while Priscilla's description of a congratulatory message by another lecturer indicates that fear of failure might have been her source of distress. Nevertheless, Priscila's last words above suggest that the lecturers did not always fail the students who did not agree with their sexual demands. Thus, she passed her module even though she did not accept the sexual advances. This was also the case with Ijay under the previous theme who said "I passed that course well".

Media reports containing personal accounts of victims of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs also show that the victims felt distressed. One of these accounts published by Lawyers Alert (a human rights blog) contained the personal accounts of a victim who described herself as Emma – a student of political science. She described her encounters with her lecturer, Mr Ken below:

> On a fine day after lectures, he [Mr Ken] invited me to his office where he told me that he liked me and made advances at me, I left for my hostel bewildered. … This situation stressed my friends and I for months, it also got me depressed because Mr. Ken became even more hostile towards me as the exam period drew near. He kept threatening to keep me in school long after my mates, if I did not concede to his demands, I practically became depressed and on the verge of giving up. … (Innocent, 2019).

Emma felt distressed, as other students had previously discussed. Her sources of distress included the usual threat lecturers often made to their targets and also the lecturer's hostility. These combined together to push Emma into depression, indicating the seriousness of the impacts of lecturers' hostile behaviours towards their students.

The current participants used words and phrases indicative of depression, anxiety, and tension (e.g., "I was really depressed"; "I was really down"; etc.). These findings support those previously reported by several researchers on this subject on how sexual harassment could lead to depression and distress in the victims (Anwar et al., 2019; 2022; Chela-Alvarez et al., 2024; Gyawali, 2021; Houle et al., 2011; Hutagalung & Ishak, 2012; Klein & Martin, 2021; Madani et al., 2023; Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017; Mushtaq et al., 2015; Otto, 1997; Rosenthal & Freyd, 2022; Stockdale et al., 2009). The current findings join the existing ones to demonstrate how depression is a common psychological outcome of sexual victimisation. Anwar et al. (2019) found that female victims of sexual harassment in their study suffered immediate distress and long-term negative consequences. Gyawali (2021) found that up to 81 percent of their 773 student participants suffered depression after being sexually harassed by their teachers. The participants also reported frustration and tension among other impacts. College women in Rosenthal & Freyd's (2022) study reported distress, depression, dissociative episode among other symptoms.

However, individual circumstances could determine the extent of distress experienced by any particular victim. Ada, for instance, explained how her age and status as a virgin contributed to her distress:

> The thing was paining me because I was little then. I was like 16 and I was still a virgin. This is one old man like that. The man should be older than my father. I mean he's really old and I'm like "how can this man break my virginity just to pass this course?" I cried and tired. Every time he saw me, he will tell me "I'm still waiting for you". Sometimes, he will smile then I would think he's being easy but he was still waiting for me. I cried for this man. I suffered. Sometimes I can't sleep cos I'm like "is this real to allow this old man to break my virginity at this age just because I'm in school?" (Ada).

Ada's words suggest that her distress stemmed from multiple sources, including her young age, the lecturer's old age, and her virginity status. It was unclear if fear of failure for not complying with the lecturer also contributed to her distress.

Amaechi described the contributions of her status as an orphan to the distress she experienced:

> I feel bad because of this incident. You know my parents are late. I don't have anybody to give me money. Maybe I can use money to cover up [i.e., the option for sex for certain lecturers] but I don't have money because it's my uncle that's helping me out. So I feel bad, I feel bad. I cry sometimes. Sometimes, I tell myself what lecturers need is just money or sex. It's not all lecturers that give you

> two options. Some of them just want sex and if you cannot do it, they tell you to get out. Sometimes, they just use it to teach you a lesson (Amaechi).

Nneka's words below suggest that she felt more distressed due to the lecturer's physical appearance:

> I had sleepless nights because of this man. He made me cry over and over again. He is so ugly. Chai! I don't want to see the face of this man at all, yet he wants to be in the same bed with me. No way! (Nneka).

Existing studies show that student victims of sexual victimisation were worried by some other factors outside the experience itself. For example, a Swedish female student who participated in Hagerlid et al.'s (2023) qualitative study complained about the huge age difference between the university staff and the student: "Yeah, the age difference can be a thing. If two 19-year-olds have this new or, or other culture in their life, rather than a 60-year-old". The current study supports the notion of age difference as an additional source of discomfort to student victims of sexual sextortion.

Crying as mentioned by several participants and also "sleepless nights" mentioned by Nneka indicate that their distress was strong enough to induce physiological reactions. These accounts show that sextortion of students are indeed serious matters that could leave the victims with psychological traumas. These current findings support Gyawali's (2021) findings that female student victims of sexual harassment and sextortion felt sad and cried. Gyawali's participants also reported sleepless nights following their experiences. The experiences of the current participants were in line with the integrated model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) whereby sexual harassment was hypothesised to produce negative psychological outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, and more.

6.3 Distrust of men

Another psychological impact of the experience of sextortion described by the current participants relates to distrust. The experiences meant that some of the victims became suspicious of men and refused to accept any offers by men for help or failed to approach men for help in different contexts due to their suspicion that the man would demand sex in return. Jacinta often drew on her experience with her lecturers to falsely predict any men she came across:

> I generalised. I mean how I view life like the Nigerian system. Even after my school, it was almost evident that this is what's happening. Unfortunately, I absorbed it as the new reality. Before I even approach somebody, at the back of my mind, I've told myself that this person is going to ask you something [sex] in return. Maybe it may be something that you really want but you have this fear of uncertainty due to previous experience (Jacinta).

Nneka stated that the experience followed her even to her marital home when she later got married, thinking that her husband could be helping ladies for sexual purposes:

> The impact is that we ladies are sexually harassed and it could lead to you thinking that all men are sexual predators and psychologically, your ego will be depleted and you will start to have low self-esteem. You will start to have very negative perception of men as sexual predators and you may carry it into your marriage and start to be suspicious of your husband. So it damages psychologically (Nneka).

The words of Jacinta and Nneka above suggest that the experience of sextortion could change the victims' mindset to suspect even innocent persons. Their words also indicate the gendered aspects of such suspicion since the victims were women while the perpetrators were men. Their accounts also show the damaging impacts of sextortion, which could also last a lifetime. Their experiences could also mean turning down offers for help, which could potentially change their lives for good. Further, the experience of sextortion could potentially cause marital problems as could be seen in Nneka's account.

The two students below developed mistrust for other lecturers after they were sexually extorted by the first lecturers they came across. This meant that they refused to approach the lecturers for help when necessary, due to suspicion:

> I can remember that there was a time, the thing actually maybe still happens now, I don't know. I can remember when I was working, you have this kind of pre-imposed fear. There's this fear that's already created. Normally, my normal self, I will still tell you what I'm supposed to tell you but then again when you see people … really going to take advantage of you. … You don't even want to have that confidence to even approach a lecturer. Like a random lecturer to clear up some things because you don't even know whether it's safe to approach him. So you have a lot of things to be battling at the back of your head at the same time (Helen).

> And I had phobia, I had phobia after that my undergraduate. Even when I was meeting my supervisor [postgraduate research supervisor]. My supervisor was being too nice and I was afraid, seriously. He was being too nice and I was just waiting for any day he would say it [demand sex]. You know you live with that kind of, but this man never said something like that and even the day we finished so late, he said let him drop me at the school gate and I rejected, and I had to walk to the gate myself. … you know my mind would just be running haywire (Amara).

The experience of sextortion in HEIs could lead to a mindset that all educators are sexual predators who are not keen to help their students unless they would gain sex in return as evident from the words of Helen and Amara above. Again, this is a long-term consequence of such an experience to the victims, which could be damaging to one's academic life because this could mean that students would be afraid to seek the help they need to be able to do well in their courses due to fear of sexual extortion.

The last theme in this current study concerns how the research participants developed a strong distrust of men after their sextortion experiences. The integrated model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) can partly explain this distrust. Although this model focuses on the work environment and job gender context while the current study focuses on the academic environment, there is a gendered aspect to the current findings. The fact that the students were targeted (by male lecturers) for being females makes the integrated model relevant. It was also this gendered nature of this act that led to the victims developing distrust of men. The victims were aware that the lecturers considered sex as a special favour they needed from the former to be able to enable them to pass their assessments and that the lecturers did not do this to male students. This led the victims to believe that men target women for favours to be able to exploit them sexually. Thus, whenever any men approached them for assistance, they became suspicious.

The last participant whose account appears below explained how the mistrust she developed in her university in Nigeria followed her to the UK university where she did her MSc Degree. Firstly, she made up her mind that nothing would make her do another Degree in Nigeria. Secondly, even when she arrived in the UK, the mistrust, which seemed to have developed into some kind of phobia meant that she avoided any occasions demanding that she would meet a lecturer on a one-on-one basis:

> When I graduated, my friend was asking me if I would do my Masters here [Nigeria] and the only thing I told her is that if I ever want to do my Masters, it must not be in Nigeria. That experience taught me a bitter lesson. One thing it made me is to fear lecturers. I mean even when I got to UK to do my Masters, I avoided those lecturers like they're Nigerian lecturers. There was a time my friend told me let's go to meet one lecturer like that and I shouted at her telling her no, I'm not seeing anybody. I know these are not Nigerian lecturers but what that man did to me made me to avoid all lecturers. Can you believe that throughout my dissertation, I did not meet my supervisor for one day to check my work? He's an English man and I didn't really think he should be into that like we have them in Nigeria but the whole thing is that anything that has to do with meeting a lecturer is not me again since I ended that battle with that wicked lecturer in that university (Tonia).

Tonia's account appears like some of the experiences described by Nigerian students in the UK in recent years. The UK is one of the most popular destinations for Nigerian students for academic purposes. Nigerian lecturers can also be found in several universities in the UK. Although Tonia did not refer to Nigerian lecturers in the UK but English lecturers, some cases that had appeared on social media referred to Nigerian lecturers in the UK. One popular example that generated huge reactions in recent times was reported by Shalom (2023) for the Legit news with the following caption: '"I thought I escaped': Lady who ran to UK for Masters program meets Nigerian lecturers again." This media report was based on the experience of a TikTok user with the username, Maureencee who posted the following to her account:

> When you run to the UK for your masters thinking you've escaped Nigerian lecturers (Shalom, 2023).

Several Nigerian students in the UK responded to the original post by Maureencee to indicate that they had similar experiences. Although Maureencee and other Nigerian students in the UK who described their encounters with Nigerian lecturers in the UK did not say these lecturers sexually harassed or exploited them, these experiences were analysed here to demonstrate the extent of the psychological damages experienced by the victims of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs. Their experiences seemed to have caused trauma that made them jittery whenever they came across lecturers identified as Nigerians even abroad. It was, however, unclear whether these students travelled to the UK for their postgraduate programmes for fear of sextortion in Nigeria or not, as was the case with Tonia who participated in the current interviews. This will benefit from future research.

The current participants firmly believed that men in positions of authority used their powers to sexually exploit women. This belief among the current participants that men offer help in return for sex seemed so strong that the former rejected supposedly genuine help from other men they met elsewhere. This supports Otto's (1997) findings that sexual victimisation changes the way women relate to other people and results in women being less friendly. It also supports Anwar et al.'s (2019) findings on how student victims of sexual harassment started feeling uncomfortable with men. Anwar et al.'s (2022) participants lived in fear of being sexually harassed again following their initial harassment experiences. Previous studies have reported similar findings. In Gyawali & Karki's (2023) study, some of the participants described avoiding people and certain situations and also not entertaining certain conversations. Similarly, Madani et al. (2023) found that student victims of sexual harassment developed suspicion of men, avoided people, and reduced their interactions with people.

As previously discussed in this current report, sextortion and sexual harassment of women is considered part of the ongoing sexism in some professions (Lu et al., 2020) and the current study has demonstrated that such sexism exists in educational establishments. One of the female victims of sexual harassment in Gyawali's (2021) study questioned God for making her a female, which is connected to the ongoing observation that sexual harassment is a gendered offence even though both genders face this experience. This particular student might have noticed that she and her fellow females were most often the targets while males who were the harassers were hardly harassed, leading to her questioning God as she felt that being a male would have saved her from her unpleasant experience. This is connected to the idea that sexual harassment is legitimised by gender norms (Livholts et al., 2024). This could be seen in the lives of the current participants. The current victims were students and the fact that they were women while their lecturers were men in institutions in a society where sexual harassment is tolerated meant that the experiences seemed unavoidable. Athanasiades et al. (2023) found a perceived lower level of resilience among female students compared to their male counterparts and the difference was statistically significant. While several factors might account for such difference, it can be argued that the frequency and pervasiveness of sexually harassing experiences by women compared to men might partly account for such poor lower level of resilience.

As demonstrated in Agazue's (2023) work on the issue of sexual harassment in Nigerian HEIs, female students face double jeopardy at the hands of their male lecturers for being women. The study shows that due to the endemic corruption in Nigeria where bribery is a common practice, male lecturers demanded sex from their female students as a form of bribe while demanding cash from male students. Double jeopardy here refers to occasions whereby the lecturers who demand cash from both male and female students also demand sex from female students having already collected cash from the latter. Some scholars (see Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017; Okafor et al., 2022) have discussed the menace of sexual harassment in Nigerian HEIs with feminist theories because the high rate of sexual harassment of female students by their male lecturers is connected to the subordination of women in such a highly patriarchal society. Muoghalu & Olaoye's (2017) participants specifically identified a "lack of respect for opposite sex" as one of the facilitating factors. Female victims of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs are less likely to report their experiences (Agazue, 2023) and Muoghalu & Olaoye (2017, p.143) have blamed this to the patriarchal orientation that often induces the fear of stigma. Students' efforts to get justice could fail or be easily ignored by their institutional authorities (Agazue, 2023; Akpambang, 2021; API, 2019) while some institutions do not have policies against sextortion and sexual harassment in the first place (Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017). The patriarchal orientation might also be responsible for these.

The notions of gendered power relations (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017) and social inequalities (Burn, 2019) have been previously discussed in this current report. These are about men holding more power and status in society, which are used to exploit women sexually. Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo (2010) found that some of their research

participants (Nigerian female students) failed to report incidents due to the powerful positions of their perpetrators (lecturers). The views of the current participants indicate that they see men as using their powers as lecturers to exploit them and their experiences skewed their minds to see this as a pattern whereby men in higher positions use such positions to sexually exploit women under their authority. It is no wonder female victims of sexual harassment in Otto's (1997) study reported a sense of powerlessness.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the psychological impacts of sextortion on female students in Nigerian HEIs. Semi-structured interviews and media reports involving personal experiences of victims of sexual harassment were used to gather the data on this phenomenon and IPA was employed to analyse the exploratory data. The experiences in the two sources of data show similar patterns. The findings show that the experience of sextortion induced fear in the victims as the victims were worried about what the perpetrators would do next. The current study also found that sextortion experiences were associated with distress; the victims reacted emotionally in different ways, such as crying, feeling anxious and depressed, having sleepless nights and more. The victims were all women while the perpetrators were all men and this brought about the gendered notion of sextortion in this study. Although only female victims of sextortion were interviewed in this current study, women are mostly the victims of this offence while men are the predominant perpetrators. The current participants were aware of this. As the male perpetrators presented sextortion as a way of helping the victims who were all females, this made the victims consider men as sexual predators who were keen to help women to exploit them sexually. This view seemed so strong in the victims' minds that some of them became determined not to seek help from men or refuse help when offered by men due to fear of being sexually harassed thereafter. This might have implications for female students requiring guidance from their male lecturers and female employees needing support from their male bosses.

While sextortion could happen in many institutions in different parts of the world, this social problem seems very severe in Nigerian HEIs where too many students are targeted by lecturers with little or no consequences. Sextortion and sexual harassment persist in Nigerian HEIs due to inadequate or lack of policies against these offences. Although some HEIs have made policies against these offences, they have persisted in such institutions due to poor enforcement or its lack entirely, or the failure of the victims to report incidents due to a lack of trust. HEIs that are serious about tackling this menace should demonstrate this to their students, including providing students with updates on cases that have been successfully resolved and offending lecturers dismissed in line with their policies on addressing this issue. Such real-life examples are likely to convince the students that the institutions are serious about addressing this menace and may encourage more victims to come forward.

It is hereby recommended that HEIs should consider creating new posts or at least nominate designated persons where students can report any incidences of sextortion and sexual harassment without any fear of repercussions. The persons should be thoroughly vetted to ensure that they have zero tolerance for sexual harassment in all its forms. The authorities of the institutions should also ensure that the persons are not corrupt in other ways, such as being willing to accept any form of bribes from suspects or protecting the suspect in the spirit of collegial camaraderie. All safeguards should be put in place to prevent these and any other forms of secondary victimisation of the victims.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experiences of sextortion or sexual harassment in relation to your psychological or mental health?
2. What would you say about these experiences regarding your relationship with other people who are not the perpetrator, particularly men in the position of authority?
3. What are other impacts these experiences might have had on your health or life in general?