

# “You have an Exam but you don’t even feel like reading”: Academic Impacts of Sextortion on Female Undergraduates

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## Abstract

Sexual extortion (sextortion) of female students by their male lecturers has been observed to be a widespread malpractice in Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs). The lecturers may deliberately fail students who rejected their sexual advances or punish them in some other ways. This current study explored the academic impacts of sextortion on Nigerian female students. Primary and secondary data were employed. Primary data involved semi-structured interviews of 25 female graduates and undergraduates selected from 6 universities and 2 polytechnics in the southeastern part of Nigeria. All the participants were real victims of sextortion at the hands of their lecturers. Secondary data came from 6 media outlets involving the accounts of victims who narrated their sextortion experiences to newsagents. The secondary data were used for triangulation purposes. Both data sources show striking similarities regarding the victims’ experiences. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Four themes were developed from the data and these are (i) Encouraging academic laziness; (ii) Inviting thoughts about dropping out; (iii) Paving the way for low grade or fail; and (iv) Jeopardising academic progress. Data relating to each theme were analysed in-depth with verbatim interview quotes. Recommendations were made on how to address sextortion in Nigerian HEIs.

**Keywords:** sextortion, sexual harassment; sex for marks; higher education institutions; female students; male lecturers, patriarchy

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## 1. Introduction

The term “sextortion” has come to mean different acts in more recent years. Several organisations define it as a form of online blackmail or revenge porn whereby someone threatens another person to expose their nude or sexual image to extort money from the latter or forcing the latter to do the former’s bidding. The definitions provided by some popular organisations or offices that could be found on the internet are in line with this, including the Metropolitan Police (UK), National Crime Agency (UK), Police Scotland (UK), UK Safer Internet Centre, eSafety Commissioner (Australia), among others. However, some academics have also started using the term to describe online blackmail (see Gámez-Guadix et al., 2022; Henry & Umbach, 2024; Notté, 2024; Wolak et al., 2018).

For clarification purposes, the sextortion referred to in this current report is unconnected online blackmail or similar acts, rather, it is based on the definition offered by the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), which coined this term in 2008 and defines it as “the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage” (IAWJ, n.d., p.19). IAWJ, in its document, uses government officials, employers and teachers as examples of the perpetrators. This is not the case with the cyber activities that have come to be defined as sextortion, as authority figures are hardly involved. Sextortion is “a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe” (IAWJ, n.d., p.19). IAWJ observed that sextortion has both corruption and sexual components, which it argues distinguishes it from other forms of “sexually abusive conduct”.

- **Sexual component:** sextortion involves a request – whether implicit or explicit – to engage in any kind of unwanted sexual activity, ranging from sexual intercourse to exposing private body parts;
- **Corruption component:** the person who demands the sexual favor must occupy a position of authority, which he abuses by seeking to exact, or by accepting, a sexual favor in exchange for exercising the power entrusted to him. That is to say, the perpetrator exercises his authority for his own gain. (IAWJ, n.d., p.19; bold emphasis in the original).

The presence of these corruption components seems to be the reason Sundström & Wängnerud (2021) do not recognise online blackmail, revenge porn and other similar phenomena as sextortion, arguing that these and other similar phenomena involving sexual acts are not a form of corruption. They stress the definition of corruption as “the *misuse* of public office for private gain” (Sundström & Wängnerud, 2021, p.5; italics in the original). 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). Just as money is used as the currency in monetary corruption, sex becomes the currency in sexual corruption (Bjarnegård et al., 2024).

The involvement of authority figures in this act who seek a “sexual favor in exchange for exercising the power entrusted to him” also aligns sextortion with “quid pro quo”. The latter 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).

Recent research investigations of sexual harassment in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) suggest that many instances fall within the definitional scope of sextortion, although this term can hardly be found in such literature as the term “sexual harassment” is almost always used to present the incidents. Bjarnegård et al. (2024, p.1354) explicitly identify lecturers’ request for sex from their students as a form of sextortion or sexual corruption because of the “abuse of entrusted authority”.

For decades, Nigerian HEIs have appeared in media and academic reports as places where lecturers use sex to determine which students get decent marks and who get the opposite. Several empirical studies show that sexual harassment, particularly the form referred to as “sex-for-marks” or “sex-for-grade,” is commonplace in Nigerian HEIs with female students constituting the main targets (Africa Polling Institute, 2019; Agazue, 2023a; Agazue, 2025; Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017; Okafor et al., 2022; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Udechukwu et al., 2020). Sex-for-marks occurs when a lecturer demands sexual favours from a student to allow the student to pass an assessment. The involvement of an authority figure in this against a subordinate makes this sextortion. Both male lecturers and female lecturers commit this offence and their victims comprise both male and female students.

However, as a gendered phenomenon, female students are the predominant victims in the hands of male (lecturers) perpetrators. This current journal article focuses solely on female students as the victims in the hands of male lecturers. Sex-for-grade is a form of sextortion because it involves both the “sexual” and “corruption” components – the two features identified by IAJW (n.d.). The former component applies when the lecturer requests sexual favours from a student, while the latter comes into play because the lecturer occupies a position of authority. However, the behaviours of the lecturers are often vaguely described as sexual harassment in academic literature and although sextortion has a lot in common with sexual harassment, it becomes imperative to become specific because there are over a dozen acts that constitute sexual harassment. Further, the involvement of authority figures in this act means that it can no longer be described as sexual harassment due to its “corruption” component. This is “sextortion”, which is in line with the definition provided by the International Association of Women Judges previously described.

This current journal article aims to demonstrate the various academic impacts of sextortion on female students in Nigerian HEIs through in-depth interviews with the victims of this act. Understanding such damaging impacts will go a long way to helping the victims cope with their traumas and negative perceptions of education and educators. The findings will also help academic institutions and other stakeholders in preventing future incidences of sextortion in academic environments and improving academic integrity.

## **2. Sextortion and Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions**

In 2018, the names of several high-ranking academic staff, including professors at top Nigerian universities whose sextortion (often described as sexual harassment) cases have appeared in the media in recent years, were published by *The Sun* newspaper (see Dike et al., 2018). A year later, an undercover investigation by BBC (2019) Africa Eye exposed the nature and severity of sextortion in some prestigious West African universities, of which a top Nigerian university, the University of Lagos (UNILAG), was one. The BBC team spent nine months interviewing both former and current students of UNILAG, which eventually led them to identify a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts as one of the culprits. The lecturer was also a former pastor of Foursquare Gospel Church, Dr Boniface Igbeneghu. BBC shows the lecturer caressing a student in his office, asking her to “switch off this light, lock the door” before telling her “I’ll kiss you for a minute”. On social media, many Nigerian

female students commenting on news reports of this in different news outlets and blogs described how they had similar experiences in what is popularly known as the *#MeToo* expressions.

In 2020, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) reported that it received more than 2,000 petitions from students allegedly harassed by lecturers in different HEIs in the country (Ayado, 2020). An analysis by the country's most widely read newspaper, *The Punch*, shows that no less than 39 lecturers in Nigeria's HEIs were indicted over sexual misconduct and dismissed as a result in the past five years preceding the report (Tolu-Kolawole, 2024). While this figure might seem high, it is important to note that many victims of this offence do not report due to fear of consequences and a lack of trust in those handling complaints in the institutions (see Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017). Further, the knowledge that some victims who reported their experiences were re-victimised by the perpetrators, their colleagues and other HEI staff (Africa Polling Institute, 2019) might also discourage reporting and prevent justice. Up to 71 percent of the 1,200 HEI students from 8 institutions who participated in Okafor et al.'s (2022) study stated that there were no known designated places to report sexual harassment in their institutions. Ogbonnaya et al. (2011) found that only 11.1 percent of their 295 participants (female students) reported their sexual victimisation experiences to the authorities. Ijtona et al. (2018) found that some victims were not keen to report their victimisation due to fear of trouble from the perpetrators (lecturers) and also the belief that the authorities of their institutions would not take action against the perpetrators. This means that perpetrators in such institutions are unlikely to be identified and punished.

Sextortion in Nigerian HEIs 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, but when 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 Ijtona 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 are incidences of 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. Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo investigated different perpetrators but found lecturers to be the perpetrators in 59.7 percent of cases and 29.1 percent of the incidents occurred inside 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.

Ijitiona 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, Ijitiona et al.'s (2018) study focused solely on lecturers as perpetrators. They found that up to 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 a 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 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 percent (197 victims) percent and C, 41.6 percent (124 victims) experienced sexual harassment. These figures align with the above obtained from public HEIs, suggesting that prevalence rates do not always differ between private and public institutions as suggested by Ijitiona et al.'s (2018) study.

Agazue (2023a) 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. The situation in Nigerian HEIs seems similar to other contexts where men sexually exploit women and girls under their care before the former can provide services to the latter (see Agazue, 2016; Agazue, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Momah, 2013).

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. Nevertheless, it is to be acknowledged 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).

### 3. Theoretical Discussion: Affective Events Theory

Affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) is "a paradigm for studying affect at work" (Weiss & Beal, 2005). It is increasingly used to predict the emotional reactions of employees to events that occur in their workplaces and environments (Christensen et al., 2023). This theory is not concerned with the environmental features, but with events as something that could easily trigger emotional reactions in those who experienced such events, and how the experience may influence their attitudes and behaviours (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Affective events theory according to Weiss & Cropanzano (1996), "gives primary emphasis on the role of events as proximal causes of affective reactions and then as more distal causes of behaviors and attitudes through affective mediation". Weiss & Cropanzano's definition of the term "event" is consistent with the definition of the term in major dictionaries, which refers to something that occurs at a certain place and a certain time. Such events may exert some impact on the person who witnessed them. The event may be positive or negative and this will determine the direction of the impact on the person who witnessed it. Common events in the workplace settings include interactions with colleagues or supervisors, colleagues' actions, completing a colleague's task, communication challenges, unfair treatment and more (see Devdutt et al., 2023). This list is, however, not exhaustive.

Weiss & Cropanzano (1996) argue that some particular events have "affective significance" on those who witness them in the sense that they may trigger emotional reactions in those people or change their moods. It is this emotional reaction or mood change associated with this theory that makes it relevant to understanding the

impacts of sextortion. Sextortion is connected to a certain event where the victim gained their experience. While an event may be positive or negative, sextortion, by its nature, is connected to a negative event, leading to the victims experiencing an emotional reaction or mood change.

Affective events theory is a testable theory (Weiss & Beal, 2005). Thus, several researchers in different disciplines have tested it empirically on different phenomena. Glasø et al. (2010) examined how emotional experiences could mediate between exposure to workplace bullying and job satisfaction and the intention to quit the job. This was based on a self-report survey of 5,520 employees of 12 organisations in Belgium. They found that workplace bullying was positively associated with negative emotions in the employees. The experience of bullying led to a decrease in organisational commitment. They found that bullying not only led to the participants experiencing negative emotions but also reduced their positive emotions while also reducing their job satisfaction and organisational commitment. It then increased the victims' intentions to leave the organisation.

Baillien et al. (2022) drew on affective events theory to study workplace bullying among 434 Finnish service workers. They found that workplace bullying disrupted the positive effect of high-performance work systems (HPWS) on work engagement. The victims' engagement in HPWS also decreased. These findings can be linked to those of Glasø et al. (2010) above on how organisational commitment in bullied employees decreased and the development of negative emotions in such employees. It could be negative emotions that led to the disruption of the supposed positive effect of HPWS in Baillien et al.' (2022) participants. Koon & Pun's (2017) is another interesting study utilising affective events theory to understand issues relating to job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion among 102 university staff in Malaysia. They found that the staff experienced emotional exhaustion following high job demands. This emotional reaction reduced their work satisfaction level and also gave rise to the instigation of workplace incivility.

Christensen et al. (2023) did a scoping review of empirical studies conducted in different countries across different continents that applied affective events theory to understand the emotional reactions and behaviours of nurses in patient care environments. They found that nurses reacted emotionally to episodes of aggression by patients and the responses included fear, concern, stress, and anxiety. Christensen et al. also considered the contributions of previous experiences to such emotional responses, such as how previous exposure to victimisation in such an environment could influence how a nurse could deal with a new event. Although events can trigger emotional reactions, certain factors may moderate the direction of such reactions (i.e., positive or negative) and their intensity. Such factors include individual traits, age, culture (Devdutt et al., 2023), gender and employment contract (Koon & Pun, 2017). Devdutt et al. (2023) found that participants who scored high on trait positive affect reported more frequent positive events and greater positive affect intensity.

Although affective events theory seems credible and empirically validated, it is not without criticisms. Some scholars have pointed out some of its limitations. Ashton-James & Ashkanasy (2005), for example, observed that this theory fails to "elucidate why, how, and when objects and events in the workplace trigger moods and emotions which in turn influence cognitive and behavioral outcomes". They also noted that the theory does not offer a theoretical basis to enable the prediction of how contextual, motivational, cognitive, or individual factors may moderate any effects of events in the workplace on affective states and how this could in turn influence behaviour.

Notwithstanding the above criticisms, this theory is relevant to the topic of investigation in this current journal article. Affective events theory was proposed with "the *structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work*" (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996, p.11; italics in the original). For scholars drawing on this theory to explain sextortion, it may seem that the theory may be more relevant to sextortion in workplaces. Nevertheless, this theory can also explain sextortion beyond the workplace due to its emphasis on emotional reactions and mood change, which is common in sexual victimisation. The negative impacts of sextortion that currently dominate the literature on sexual harassment might not be so if the experience does not trigger emotional reactions in the victims. It is on this ground that the affective events theory could be used beyond sextortion-related experiences in the workplace. Sextortion and sexual harassment in HEIs trigger emotional reactions in the victims (see Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Bull, 2022; Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Gyawali, 2021; Gyawali & Maharjan, 2022; Gyawali & Karki, 2023; Klein & Martin, 2021; Madani et al., 2023; Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Rosenthal & Freyd, 2022) just as they do to those who experienced them in their workplaces. This makes this theory relevant to this current research.

#### **4. Academic 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.

Cuenca-Piqueras et al.'s (2023) review shows that the growing research interest in sexual harassment focuses mostly on the work environment. Nevertheless, research has been accumulating in other areas, in which the academic environment is one. Studies on sextortion (often described as sexual harassment) in HEI environments have also paid attention to the academic impacts of this social problem. While sexual harassment in HEIs environment is perpetrated by different culprits, including teachers, peers, administrative staff, and possibly more, teachers are the focus of this literature review as the current study concerns the impacts of this act perpetrated by teachers on their students. The literature review will focus on male teachers targeting female students and not those involving peers, as the latter does not qualify as sextortion due to the peers not having formal authority over the targets. It is worth stating, however, that in some studies, the researchers did not conduct separate analyses for the impacts of the acts perpetrated by teachers and those committed by peers.

Just as more female students are the targets for sextortion and sexual harassment than men (API, 2019; Athanasiades et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2024; Office for Students, 2024; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Suleiman, 2017), female students also feel the academic impacts of these offences more than male students do (Athanasiades et al., 2023). In Jeffrey et al.'s (2023) study of sexual victimisation among Canadian university students, 19 percent of female victims reported that their experience impacted their academic performance "quite a bit or a great deal" but none of the male victims reported such a high impact. 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 males were 78 percent compared to only 15 percent of incidents by those identified as females. This suggests that women are more often at the receiving end – from experiencing the incident to feeling the impact.

In a study of the academic impacts of sexual harassment on female university students in Bangladesh, Mondol et al. (2020) found that victims experienced anger, fear, helplessness, lack of attention to regular activities, lack of concentration on their studies, and sleeplessness, among other impacts. A similar study in Pakistan found that the vast majority (over 84%) of the students reported a lack of motivation in their studies. The victims also reported a sense of fear and insecurity, discomfort, loss of confidence, loss of interest in their studies, loss of concentration, and skipping lessons. More than 79 percent reported a loss of concentration. Madani et al.'s (2023) study of sexual harassment of female university students in Pakistan found that it led to difficulty focusing on studies, poor attention to studies, poor attendance to lessons, and skipping exams, in addition to numerous psychological impacts. Nigerian female university students reported inability to pay attention to lessons and difficulty studying (Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010). It is worth stating that even though the term "sexual harassment" was used in these studies, some of these studies investigated sextortion because teachers or lecturers were involved and their students were their targets.

More recent studies of Nigerian female university students found that sexual harassment victimisation on campus was linked to poor academic performance, lack of focus (Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016), changes to academic plans, decreased academic performance, and loss of motivation to study (Muoghalu & Olaoeye, 2017). Ogbonnaya et al.'s (2011) study in Nigeria found that 56.5 percent of their 295 participants (female students) reported experiencing poor academic performance. Another set of female victims in Nigeria in another study reported dropping out of their university courses (Udechukwu et al., 2020). Again, these studies were more about sextortion than sexual harassment due to the involvement of lecturers targeting their students.

Gyawali & Karki (2023) conducted a qualitative study of the impacts of sexual harassment on female university students in Nepal and reported numerous effects on the victims. The academic impacts the victims described included a lack of concentration in their studies, failing examinations, poor participation in class activities, and problems completing homework and assignments. A previous study by Gyawali & Maharjan (2022) reported similar academic impacts in addition to receiving poor marks, a lack of interest in attending classes, and a willingness to move to another institution. Gyawali & Maharjan (2022) had a total of 371 participants (all female students) in their study, and among these, 78 percent and 80 percent stated that sexual harassment affected their school activities and learning activities were affected, respectively

Qualitative studies on the academic impacts of sexual harassment among HEI victims have enabled victims to explain "how" this problem affected them. One of the victims of sexual harassment in Gyawali & Karki's (2023, p.52) qualitative study stated that whenever she opened her book to read, "I felt illusion and started to see the

face of that perpetrator on pages of copy and felt fear". The perpetrator was a teacher, thus, this was a sextortion incident. This student described herself as an active learner and participant in class discussions before the incident, but after the incident, she could no longer do any of these and this led to her performing poorly in her examination. Another student in the study also described how the memory of sexual harassment disrupted her learning activities: "Whenever I tried to engage in assignments, class discussions, or presentations, the memory of that incident would resurface, causing sudden disruption to my various learning activities" (Gyawali & Karki, 2023, p.53). Another student described how her experience led to social exclusion, leading to her giving up some vital vocational programmes due to fear and irritation. In Gyawali's (2021) earlier qualitative study, different academic impacts were reported, such as avoiding asking the teacher questions in the classroom for fear of picking up on them again having been sexually harassed previously; feeling mentally weak in the presence of the teacher (which would affect academic performance); a lack of interest to go to school; and changing school among other impacts.

Bull's (2022) qualitative report shows how a sexual harassment victim changed her sitting position during lectures (for fear of being watched), stopped attending lectures, and eventually withdrew from her course due to sexual advances by her professor. This finding supports Rosenthal & Freyd's (2022, p.461) argument that "constant vigilance to prevent contact [the perpetrator] may penalize their [students] mental health and academic success". These qualitative studies have provided examples of how sexual harassment by teachers or sextortion affected the students academically. Molstad et al.'s (2021) systematic review of 13 journal articles found that sexual assault in the university environment across all the studies was associated with a series of academic problems, including learning difficulties, lower grades, and dropping out of the university. Although this review has made some interesting findings, it focused on sexual assault, which seems more severe than sextortion and sexual harassment.

## 5. Methods

### 5.1 Research Design

This current study is based on the phenomenological approach. This approach focuses on lived experiences of individual participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). As this current study was based on the lived experiences of female students who experienced sextortion, the phenomenological approach was deemed the most suitable among all the qualitative approaches. 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 sexual harassment in Nigeria are mostly based on quantitative research (Agazue, 2023a) and this means that much is not known about the different ways in which sextortion incidents in HEI environments affect the victims academically. Thus, the current research aimed to explore this with linguistic data to allow the participants to provide a detailed account of how their victimisation experiences affected their academic life.

### 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 students who were the real victims of sextortion in the hands of their lecturers. Two sampling techniques were adopted – 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 experienced sextortion at the hands of male lecturers was purposively recruited. The researcher needed people with firsthand experience of sextortion, thus, these participants were the most suitable. 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. Thus, he relied on some of the victims to refer him to other victims they knew if they felt comfortable with this request. The first few victims he met were happy to get in touch with their peers, who also agreed to be interviewed by the researcher.

The research data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, questions are predetermined and phrased to enable responses that tap into a particular topic area (Longhurst, 2016). This interview method 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 25 participants (aged

18 to 32) took part in the interviews. The participants were all women, comprising recent graduates and undergraduates of different HEIs. The participants came from a total of 6 institutions, consisting of 6 universities and 2 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 reported them to 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, which 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 6 media outlets, and these included Punch (cited as Folarin, 2017), The Sun (cited as Dike et al., 2018), Lawyers Alert (cited as Innocent, 2019), HumAngle (cited as Victor, 2023), CNN (cited as Adebayo & Busari, 2018) and University World News (cited as Deji-Folulile, 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 Samsung tablet with the participants' permission. This device was password-protected to prevent unauthorised access to the electronic data should it become lost or stolen. 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 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 details of institutions during the analysis in line with the BPS's 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 could be distressing to the victims. The researcher then considered the possibility that recalling such unpleasant experiences might upset some participants. 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. Two participants felt emotional at some point, and the researcher suspended the interviews, but they later indicated their readiness to complete the process afterwards. None of them needed psychological support after the interviews.

### 5.4 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Analysis

The data were analysed via thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a "method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.120). In thematic analysis, the data are searched for co-occurring patterns of meaning or issues that are of interest to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The current data were searched in the same manner after transcribing it from the Samsung tablet. The researcher searched the data for patterns. Microsoft Word's "track changes" tool was used to code the patterns after identifying them. The researcher first searched for co-occurring responses or meanings and then highlighted them and used the "comment" tool to give the highlighted passages names that broadly suggested the meanings in the data. These names appeared in the right margin of the document. He did this repeatedly and then merged codes that appeared to refer to quotes with similar meanings. Thereafter, the researcher introduced the codes in the manuscript and analysed them.

## 6. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the current data revealed that sextortion had a series of academic impacts on the victims based on the victims' accounts of their personal experiences. These impacts are presented under four separate themes below: *Encouraging academic laziness*; *Inviting thoughts about dropping out*; *Paving the way for low grade or fail*; and *Jeopardising academic progress*. Each of these themes was introduced below. The data relating to each of them were analysed in depth, and verbatim quotes from the interviews were used as evidence of their true words. The data were also interpreted to provide the reader with greater insights into the phenomenon of



sextortion in Nigerian HEIs. The findings were also discussed with references to existing academic literature in the field.

### *6.1 Encouraging academic laziness*

Academic laziness was developed as a theme from the data because several participants stated that they considered reading as a waste of their time since they already believed that their efforts would not count towards their success if they refused to offer sex to the lecturer as demanded. While different victims described their perceptions differently, the major issue that stood out from the data is academic laziness or unwillingness to study as can be seen from their accounts below:

The thing is that if I had sex with him, I will not write the exam. ... He will just give me mark. I will not write the exam. I will not even come the day of the exam. I will not stress myself (Ann).

Now, the whole thing is that, yes, it affected me. I just gave up on reading because there's no need putting in effort and somebody is at the end trying to frustrate you. So I had to really give up. ... (Hope).

It was not encouraging at all. First of all, you're going to really get discouraged towards studying. It's not worth it. ... you're demoralised. You don't even have that morale sometimes to even go to the department. ... academically and personally, myself, I was demoralised. Just like I was discouraged towards studying. That's number one (Jessica).

... my attitude to learning changed. I could not take study seriously anymore because you think you can play your way through the university. Some of the issues of low quality of education obtainable in Nigeria is caused by this issue with lecturers because the girls are no longer studying. ... (Ebere).

It was very saddening. Look, I'm this person that take things serious but it kind of demoralise your effort. Immediately that thing happened [sexual demand], the next year, I told my friend, there's no need me going to class because I already know that I would fail the course. That I will not go for the class again because your effort is not what matters. ... it's too demoralising (Nzube).

You would be like what am I even studying for? ... It's not worth the effort. ... your mates are clubbing and you're reading, they're sleeping and you're reading, the time your mates are just gossiping outside and you're just reading. ... it's a waste of time reading because the effort doesn't count. After that statement [threat to fail student if she refused to offer sex], I stopped touching my books about that course (Precious).

The experiences of these victims, as they narrated above, indicate that sextortion by lecturers not only affected them during the periods of the incidents, but also went further to harm their future. In other words, the academic laziness they developed could have a way of limiting their academic knowledge. Assessments are meant to test students' knowledge and this normally puts pressure on the students to read widely to increase their chances of passing their assessments. Unfortunately, the students' perceptions that success would be solely determined by the sex they would offer to their lecturers meant that they did not consider it worthwhile to study ahead of their examinations or other forms of assessments. Precious stated that reading was "not worth the effort". Nzube stated that her reading effort "was abandoned like a dream". For Ann: "I will not stress myself". These indicate that thoughts that their marks were already predetermined. Jessica was "discouraged towards studying" and Ebere's "attitude to learning changed". In fact, Ebere went beyond her personal experiences to explain how sextortion in Nigerian HEIs affects educational standards in the country:

When you offer somebody a grade that she does not merit, it's not a reflection of her position of knowledge or ability. So it tends to lower the standard of education in Nigeria and it's rubbishing our educational system (Ebere).

This is understandable because students who obtained their results based on sexual exchanges might not be able to defend such results in real-world situations. Their unwillingness to read meant that they could not acquire sufficient knowledge compared to their mates who studied well. The behaviours of the lecturers suggest the level of corruption in the institutions. Institutions have rules and in educational establishments, a student must attend an examination before they can pass any courses that are assessed through examination (if they do well) but as the cases above indicate, a student could pass even without attending the examination in the first place. On the other hand, a student who participated in the examination and did well could be deliberately awarded a fail for

not satisfying her lecturer sexually. Nevertheless, this cannot be generalised to all the HEIs. It is possible that the authorities of certain HEIs could be so strict that no student who did not sit an exam could pass the assessment.

Dominica described her experience and also those of her friends who were also her coursemates to illustrate how common the practice was in her department:

First of all, sometimes you're going to develop this sense of apathy towards education in general but towards that course, you're going to ask yourself why am I studying? You have an exam but you don't even feel like reading. You'll be like what's the essence of reading when you're still going to do this [offer sex]? I had my friends then [i.e., before her own experience], you'll be reading and killing yourself and they would just be messing around and at the end of the day, they would have A. ... So it was demeaning (Dominica).

Although Dominica had first-hand experience, which she compared to her coursemates', it is worth stating that there was no evidence from her to prove that her friends offered sex to their lecturers to be able to earn their high grades. One does not necessarily need to read as much as other students or at the same time other students were reading to be able to do well in examinations. Nevertheless, her message is understood; as these experiences are common in Nigerian HEIs, students could easily suspect that certain students they identified as academically lazy passed with flying colours because they were able to satisfy their lecturers, sexually.

Emma's accounts of her encounters with her lecturer, Mr Ken as published by the Lawyers Alert (a human rights blog) show how academic laziness set in:

During this period I was slowly becoming embittered and getting distracted from my studies. I was on the borderline of losing it because of my seeming helplessness. I was discouraged many times to attend classes. ... (Innocent, 2019).

Emma developed academic laziness, similar to the victims interviewed in this current study. She no longer had the zeal for attending classes as this might appear like a waste of time because her success did not depend on the outcome of her reading but sex with her lecturer, which she was unwilling to offer. The vice-chancellor of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Professor Ignatius Onimawo mentioned academic laziness linked to both monetary and sexual extortion as one of the issues he needed to address in this institution during his press interview in 2021. According to Professor Onimawo, "when I became the VC, I found out that the malpractices in the system were making the students lazy" (Adedipe, 2021). The malpractices he referred to included bribery and sexual exchanges. He then described how a computer-based examination he introduced addressed the issue of sextortion and the consequent laziness "because no female student needed to sleep with anyone before she could pass her exams" as they would normally get their "results instantly" (Adedipe, 2021).

Previous studies in this area have also reported instances of academic laziness following sexual harassment, such as those by Muoghalu & Olaoye (2017) who found that Nigerian female victims of sexual harassment in academic environments lost their motivation to study. Gyawali & Karki's (2023) Pakistani victims of sexual harassment reported problems completing their homework and poor participation in class activities while Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo's (2010) Nigerian participants reported an inability to pay attention to lessons, and difficulty studying. Gyawali & Maharjan's (2022) participants reported a lack of interest in attending classes. In Gyawali & Karki's (2023) study, students who used to be active learners suddenly slowed down, which eventually affected their academic performances, negatively. The current participant, Ebere stated that "I could not take study seriously anymore because you think you can buy your way through the university". This stands as an example of the reason the victims developed academic laziness. Being sextortion meant that an "authority figure" was involved and this made the student powerless. She might have felt that her academic success was in the hands of the lecturer, therefore, she could not be bothered to study.

However, it was unclear whether the students in some of the studies cited in the above paragraph experienced academic laziness because of their belief that their self-effort did not matter or other reasons. While some students might have given up studying due to their belief that the lecturers would determine their success based on meeting the latter's sexual demands or not, lack of attention to lessons, lack of interest in studies, difficulty studying and other problems could also result from psychological impacts of sextortion or sexual harassment, such as anxiety, depression, confusion, fear, anger, stress, discomfort, insomnia and more (see Agazue, 2025; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Mondol et al., 2020). Such psychological impacts could also lead to behaviours that are likely to disrupt one's attention to their study. For example, lack of concentration or attention to study (Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Gyawali & Karki, 2023; Madani et al., 2023; Mondol et al., 2020) is among the academic impacts of sextortion and sexual harassment reported by student victims around the world. Other

academic impacts include lack of motivation to study, lack of interest to study, skipping lessons (Mondol et al., 2020), inability to pay attention to lessons, difficulty studying (Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010), lack of interest to attend class (Gyawali, 2021), avoiding lectures (Bull, 2022), poor participation in class activities, and problems completing homework and assignments (Gyawali & Karki, 2023). The above impacts are very likely to disrupt the learning process.

Weiss & Cropanzano (1996) have linked the affective events theory to academic engagement, noting that since affective experiences usually force people to change their normal behaviour, students may decrease academic engagement to cope with the event. They argue that a “negative affective event might cause a person to detach from the present moment and keep them ruminating on the negative event of the past” (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and for students, this could mean less absorption in their study or any worthwhile academic activities. This theory can explain the academic laziness that some victims of sextortion in this current study.

## 6.2 *Inviting thoughts about dropping out*

The current research participants contemplated dropping out as they felt that they had no better ways of dealing with their experiences of sextortion. Thus, this theme was developed to represent one of the negative academic impacts of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs. Several of the victims in this current study told the researcher that they had contemplated dropping out at some point during their courses when they felt that the pressure from the lecturers to offer sex seemed to becoming too unbearable.

If you see a student now, they know what they want to study in school but the challenges, they just drop out because of this. So we have little bit challenges. Sometimes, in my ND, I was like, should I give in [i.e., offer sex to her lecturer] because of the situation I was seeing, because of the challenges, but as time goes on, I just thank God that I didn't do that. Then I started feeling like, eh, just to end this whole thing [i.e., to drop out] to help yourself. It is really challenging. ... I feel bad, I feel bad (Phina).

At times, you go through everything and you start crying. It's not easy. At times, you feel that prayer cannot even solve it. They like to frustrate people. Some people drop out of school. It's really bad. It's not really easy at all. This thing can cause somebody to even commit suicide. I regretted why I entered school. ... You feel like giving up [i.e., to drop out] and rest (Agnes).

Both Phina and Agnes contemplated dropping out at some point during their courses but decided to continue. This thought came as a last resort when they felt no other solution was available. While some of the victims described their personal encounters, they also referred to those of their friends to stress that such experience was not uncommon, particularly in departments that had many women:

... because they have so many women. They have so many women in this department. These lecturers that do this thing, even the HOD, I know at least in my school, they frustrate these people [students] and you'll feel like dropping out just as I thought about at some point. It's that bad (Alice).

Some never finished course. Those kind of things. With the grades, some just dropped out of school. Some just kept waiting to see if the courses would be changed. It's just terrible if the person [lecturer who demands sex] is your supervisor. It got to a point when I felt like I can't take this anymore because, I mean it's something that keeps your head aching (Tochi).

The first-hand experiences provided by the interview participants in this current study also match those previously narrated to media personnel by the victims of this same menace. For example, Wande Ebe, the founder of Wanda Adu Foundation (NGO for the victims of gender-based violence) described how she contemplated dropping out of her course during her university years after she was overwhelmed by pressure as reported by Dike et al. (2018) in The Sun news.

My experience in school was awesome until my second year .... It was a horrible experience. They [lecturers] tried all they could but I vowed not to succumb and I paid for it. They worked against me. ... My grade point (GP) was so bad by 300 level that I contemplated dropping out because I lost interest in school (Dike et al., 2018).

Similarly, a journalist, Kiki Mordi whose personal account of sextortion was reported in on HumAngle described how her academic journey ended abruptly:

I'm a 28-year-old who never got to finish school because of one thing. It wasn't because I wasn't brilliant or anything, I was a high flyer when I was growing up but I didn't even finish, all because of sexual harassment (Victor, 2023).

Frustration was a common experience among the victims that led to the contemplation of dropping out. Ebe contemplated dropping out due to low grade, which was a form of frustration. However, the sources of the frustration varied among the victims. Tochi, for instance, contemplated dropping out as the only solution left for her to regain her life. For Ebe, it was her low grades. Nevertheless, one would not ignore the traumatic impact of being pressured by several lecturers to offer sex or suffer the consequences. The current findings support previous ones on this same phenomenon. Quantitative studies of Nigerian student victims of sexual victimisation found that the victims mentioned dropping out of the university as a consequence (Udechukwu et al., 2020). An earlier study found that the students lost motivation to continue their studies (Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017). While lack of motivation and dropping out seem different, a lack of motivation could lead to dropping out.

Gyawali's (2021) participants reported changing to another institution after their sexual victimisation. Some of the participants reported a lack of interest in attending classes, which could pave the way to dropping out or moving out of the institution. Similarly, Bull's (2022) report shows how a student sexually harassed by her professor in the UK stopped attending lectures and later withdrew from her course. Molstad et al.'s (2021) systematic review also established dropping out as one of the academic consequences of sexual harassment. The current study supports these previous studies, but with exploratory data.

### *6.3 Paving way for low grade or fail*

This theme was developed from the current research data because the victims of sextortion in this current study believed that the lecturers they refused sex deliberately offered them marks they considered lower than expected. Other participants believed that the lecturers failed them deliberately for rejecting the latter's sexual advances. Some students compared the marks their lecturers gave them to the marks they earned from other lecturers who did not demand sex before they were convinced that the lecturers they refused sex marked them down as a result. Some of the participants also compared the marks they received from the lecturers that demanded sex before and after the demand, i.e., for lecturers who taught them in different classes or modules.

I think something brought all of us again to him. You know we had to finish that second year and entered third year. So in third year, he didn't teach us. So it was always when I ran into him that until he actually said it "is it because he showed that he likes me?" You know those kind of things. ... But the only thing I know was that the next class he took, I stopped getting A. I started getting C. Even the C was on the margin like you would have gone to D (Angel).

In that exam, we got D. ... Normally, the result would be pasted to our department. He said the result is in his office. That's where you got to know your result. ... Then all those people we know that haven't at least been to his office [before the exam], they kept falling between E and F. And he said that he's not gonna paste until everybody comes to see him. You don't go in groups, that's one thing. You enter one by one.... So when I came, he looked at me and said I made an E (Ozy).

That [i.e., demand for sex] was too much. That was even when I was having issues with my supervisor. The HOD was actually my supervisor but he appointed another one that could assist him with supervising. The HOD does not have that time [i.e., sexual demand]. During my three hundred level, there was a new lecturer. He actually said that he likes me but I did not give him a response but all of a sudden, during our final year, during our project, he became my supervisor. ... He actually gave me E but I don't mind. I did not mind about his course but I avoid him (Nneka).

Angel believed her journey to poor marks started when she could not reciprocate the lecturer's words about how he liked her. Thus, she considered her poor marks as revenge by the lecturer. This was also the case with Nneka. For Ozy, her lecturer ruled that his female students needed to visit his office to see him one-on-one before their examination. Although Ozy did not say the reason for this, her words indicated that those who did not visit the lecturer were targeted for poor marks. A recent study (Agazue, 2023a) shows that lecturers are fond of presenting their sexual demands to the students in their offices. The study also found that sexual activities take place in some lecturers' offices, and this is common knowledge to students, making them jittery whenever a lecturer requests that they visit his office. An earlier study by Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo (2010) found that 29.1 percent of sexual victimisation incidents reported by their 398 respondents (female students) occurred inside their lecturers' offices. Cases of students being pinned down and stripped in lecturers' offices have also appeared in the press, as reported by the victims (see Salaudeen, 2018).

While the above students believed that the lecturers gave them poor marks for not meeting the latter's sexual demands, other students believed that the lecturers failed them for the same purpose. Several victims in this current study failed. They tried to compare their performances to other modules and also considered other circumstances, such as whether a particular lecturer demanded sex or not, before they arrived at their conclusion that their poor grade or fail was due to their refusal to offer sex when demanded.

If you look at my transcript, you're going to really see that, like other courses I was having like A, B, but these courses, and it's really painful because those courses are like my main courses. ... I have to go start again. So it starts metamorphosing into threats. ... He would go and tell you "why are you hiding it [i.e., withholding sex] for?" He failed me in a lot of courses, all the courses, even the project he handled me on. So I had to repeat all the courses. It was very deliberate like, overly deliberate ... So when I was writing it as a carryover, another lecturer handled that particular one [she passed]. So it was just very clear that it was very, very deliberate (Dimma).

It really affected me in my ND two, after my internship. During my HND one, I think all my life, yes, all my life because even right from primary school, I've not really gone beyond ... [voice became inaudible]. It was very, very bad! When I saw my result, I was literally crying without minding that people were there because, yes, it was very bad. I think it was a huge score to get to, I think two point something. I've not had two points in my entire life. So when I saw that result, it was very shocking (Dabere).

For Dimma, it seemed that her lecturer believed that she owed him sex considering the level of threats and interrogations she received from the lecturer who asked her why she was "hiding it". She was convinced that this was the reason for her failure because she considered herself a brilliant student who consistently earned As and Bs in her other modules. Debere was similarly brilliant and this seemed to be the reason she wept so much as she was not personally used to receiving very poor marks.

While it might appear that lecturers whose sexual advances were turned down used failure to punish the students, Modesta suggested that failing a student could also serve another purpose, i.e., putting pressure on the student to meet the lecturer whereby the latter would present sex to the former as the only option to pass.

They would keep doing this [i.e., deliberating awarding fail] so you can come around and they will tell you this [sex] is what I want until you yield. If you don't yield, you keep getting bad grades. The bad grades were terrible. I'm telling you. You're the one that will be asking yourself what happened. Once this guy releases the script, it will always be like that (Modesta).

Three other victims below collaborated the above statement:

In my case, I had my course carryover. I failed it and had it's carryover because I know what [i.e., sex] the man is demanding and I swore never to give him that you know (Juliana).

We went to him [after exam mass failure] and he said that guys should pay money and the ladies should pay in kind [i.e., sex]. So probably those we saw earlier in his office were those who started paying upfront. Hahaha! It wasn't funny. He gave most of us E and will be telling you that you didn't write anything in your exam (Chinwe).

When your result comes out, you'll be asking yourself, wait, all those things you're writing, you know, in first semester, we used to borrow additional scripts to fill up after finishing the first script. Then your result will come out and you will be shocked. Then they [lecturers] will tell you the solution [i.e., offer sex or money]. Every student knows what happens [why they get low grades] and they know the person to meet who will meet the man and he will tell you what he said you should do (Chinaza).

Chinaza's last statement above, i.e., "they know the person to meet", refers to the fact that some lecturers have designated persons who communicate their demands to the students (see Agazue, 2023a). For some lecturers, their course representatives might be used while other lecturers have persons often referred to as "errand boys" (see also Agazue, 2023a). These designated persons are usually fellow coursemates of the targeted students.

Two participants explained below that their lecturers had different ways of punishing those who did not meet their sexual demands and this included pretending that their examination scripts had gone missing.

The typical effect you will have from them is low grade. The way you keep rejecting them, they can take you three years. That means all the courses you take, you will have low grades or you will



just fail. That's just the typical and even when you go to meet him and they may say your script is missing, that you didn't even write the exam. Unfortunately, there's not even things like CCTV that will show that you're in class. It is terrorising. ... Afterwards, when you check your results, you may actually be lucky to get two-one and all that but if you check what those other grades [low grades intentionally given to students] could have given you, they pull you down. There's no way against that (Martina).

Sometimes, it's either he says your script is missing or all your grades, maybe everything is As, Bs [with other lecturers], and then that particular one [the particular lecturer's course] is just F, the only one. I heard HOD had to ask him, you know, even the HOD that was taking courses with postgraduates. So at least, the person could say these students here, I know their capabilities. He was the one to ask him: "Why were your students failing like this?" He said they didn't understand the course, he was asking them this and they were answering that. Then he asked him: "Is that their fault or you the lecturer didn't teach them what they didn't understand?" (Njide).

Njide implied that the lecturer used a lack of knowledge on the students' part to defend the mass failure when the HOD confronted him, but in reality, the lecturer deliberately failed many female students who rejected his sexual advances. Wande Ebe, the founder of Wanda Adu Foundation (NGO for the victims of gender-based violence) described personal experiences that matched those provided by some of the above victims (see Dike et al., 2018). Like some of the victims above, Ebe rejected her lecturers' sexual demands and faced the consequence as reflected in her statement below: "I ended up with a third class after I had spent six years in school for four years programme" (Dike et al., 2018). She described how it all started as follows:

My experience in school was awesome until my second year when four of my lecturers including my HOD took sexual interest in me. It was a horrible experience. They tried all they could but I vowed not to succumb and I paid for it. They worked against me. One continuously recorded me absent on his assessments and exams. Even when I wrote exams, he will claim that attendance sheet had gone missing. My grade point (GP) was so bad by 300 level that I contemplated dropping out because I lost interest in school (Dike et al., 2018).

The issue of missing scripts is also common; it is one of the tactics that sexually extorting lecturers use to punish students. Emaikwu (2012, p.138) previously reported this as a practice involving a "good number of academic staff in universities". Ebe's account of her unpleasant experiences was considered necessary in this analysis to demonstrate that the students that are sometimes labelled "weak" or "lazy" due to their poor marks are not always so because some lecturers could deliberately give those students low marks either as a way of forcing the student to meet the lecturer or as an act of revenge for failing to provide sex when demanded. Evidence from other sources also suggests that some lecturers deliberately fail students as a way of forcing the student to meet the lecturer for sex. A female student, Monica Osagie who recorded her professor's demand for "five rounds of sex" at the Obafemi Awolowo University (Ile Ife) told CNN that she believed the professor failed her deliberately as a way of getting her to have sex with him after the student had previously turned down the professor's request for a sexual relationship (Adebayo & Busari, 2018). This is similar to cases involving accusations of examination malpractice, whereby the invigilating lecturers falsely accuse innocent students of cheating during examination as a way to force the latter to meet them so they could demand sex.

Another case that featured in the media widely in recent years was that of a nursing student of the Ogun State College of Health Technology, who was impregnated by his lecturer. She described how the lecturer and another lecturer who seemed to have communicated together deliberately failed her in anticipation that she would meet them for sex before she could pass. She described her encounters with both lecturers as reported by a journalist below:

Dr Adu is the Oral Health Coordinator for the college. During my three years study, he taught me two courses each semester. I have never failed his course. 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. He said he didn't approach me in 100 level because another lecturer was interested in dating me. The lecturer he mentioned told me in 100 level that it was either I paid him money or used my body to pass his course. Because I didn't agree, I failed his course. .... I told Adu

that I would date him, but I didn't want to have any problem, and he assured me that there would be no regret (Folarin, 2017).

Emma's accounts of her encounters with her lecturer, Mr Ken as published by the Lawyers Alert (a human rights blog) also show that the lecturer failed her deliberately for refusing to have sex with him.

Despite Mr. Ken's threats, I forged ahead to write the exams without sleeping with him and Mehn! That man was true to his word. By the time results were out for the first semester the F and D on the board were staring at me, I had failed his two courses and those were the only courses I had issues with. ... (Innocent, 2019).

Mr Ken had earlier threatened Emma with failure: "He kept threatening to keep me in school long after my mates, if I did not concede to his demands. ..." (Innocent, 2019). So, with the threat in mind, Emma compared the results she received from him to those she received from other lecturers to conclude that the D (low mark) and F (fail) she received from Mr Ken were an act of revenge. Similar cases are frequently reported in the Nigerian press. The introductory section of this journal article contains the case of a student of the University of Lagos whose lecturer failed twice for refusing to offer sex before threatening her that she would not pass the course shortly after the lecturer died in a road accident (Oamen, 2021).

In April 2024, a video was shared widely on social media regarding an incident at the University of Port Harcourt, where a man who was later identified as a lecturer at the university was drawing a young woman towards his body while also touching her indecently. The incident was said to have been covertly recorded by a bystander from outside the window of the lecturer's office. Deji-Folutile (2024) described on the University World News a comment made by a female student victim of this lecturer while reacting to the video on X:

I remember this man ... [He] frustrated me from Year two till my final year. Failed me too many times in his course. Just because he wanted to sleep with me. I had an extra year in Uniport because of this man's course. I really hope the right people see this (Deji-Folutile, 2024).

Deji-Folutile (2024) also reported incidents in other universities around the time and presented a comment from another female student from another university who said the following:

... One of the lecturers spotted me and asked me out, which I rejected. 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. I vowed never to give in to his pressure and was ready to face whatever consequences. And, fortunately for me, the man lost interest in me and allowed me to go through my project with no issues. I can't explain what happened to him. I think I was just lucky. Honestly, I don't wish many of my lecturers well (Deji-Folutile, 2024).

These selected media cases collaborate with the current participants' first-hand accounts. They show that female students from different HEIs in different parts of the country had similar experiences. Their refusal to offer sex to their lecturers when demanded led to the lecturers punishing them with low grades or fail. However, the last quote above suggests that lecturers do not always mark students down for rejecting their sexual advances or that they do not do that in all situations. This corroborates the first-hand accounts of the current participants analysed under the next theme. Further, Agazue's (2023) research report on this phenomenon has also shown that some lecturers do not punish the students who reject their sexual advances.

Previous researchers have consistently established a link between sexual victimisation and poor academic performance or failure. Jordan et al.'s (2014) study in the United States found that sexual victimisation was related to low GPA among the victims. Canadian female university students in Jeffrey et al.'s (2023) study stated that their academic performance was affected as a result of their sexual victimisation. Other researchers (Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Gyawali & Karki, 2023; Gyawali & Maharjan, 2022; Molstad et al., 2021) have also reported similar findings. Sexual harassment and sextortion could lead to poor academic performance or failure due to the psychological impacts of this act, such as anxiety, depression, confusion, fear, anger, stress, discomfort, insomnia and more (see Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Mondol et al., 2020). Such psychological impacts could also lead to behaviours that are likely to disrupt one's attention to their study. For example, lack of concentration or attention to study (Agazue, 2025; Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Gyawali & Karki, 2023; Madani et al., 2023; Mondol et al., 2020) is among the academic impacts of this experience reported by student victims around the world.

However, the findings of the above-cited studies were different from those of the current study in terms of the causes of low grades and fail. The previous studies above suggest that low grades or fail are caused by the psychological effects of sexual victimisation, but the current study shows different patterns – lecturers deliberately failed their students or gave them low grades for rejecting their sexual advances. This suggests that even the victims whose psychological impacts were not too serious to affect the outcome of their assessments might fail because such failure was the lecturer’s deliberate decision. This is an intriguing finding, which has featured in media literature in recent times but has not attracted sufficient academic attention.

#### *6.4 Jeopardising academic progress*

The current participants recounted their experiences of delays to their supposedly academic progress caused by their lecturers or behaviours that could make progress difficult. These participants believed that the lecturers delayed them deliberately as a punishment for refusing to agree to their sexual demands. Most of these experiences were connected to the supervision of dissertation projects, which is one of the activities that bring students in close contact with their lecturers, making the student vulnerable to outright sextortion (see Agazue, 2023a).

If I submit work, he will tell me it’s rubbish. If I submit Chapter One, he will tell me it’s rubbish. If I write Chapter One five times, he would reject it. ... I was so frustrated. The HOD sef, he’s not even trying when I told him everything. ... Other people were like “I’m almost done, I’m compiling my work” but nothing was working for me. ... (Merit).

The one that actually pained me was that my supervisor was actually asking for the same [sex]. He frustrated me. It was at the dying minute that I had to compile my project [due to delay]. I told him that I’m not doing anything [i.e., not willing to offer sex], he kept telling me come today, come tomorrow (Antonia).

He started telling us to come to his office to choose topics or research the topic and when you get to his office, you would see some of your department mates in the office. Some ladies, you would find them there either sitting on the couch or sitting on the table. Ehm, sometimes, he would say he’s busy. So you have to go back. You have to come there at least three or four times before he would approve the topic unless you’re on the fast lane [i.e., willing to accept his sexual advances] if you know what I mean (Ozy).

The fact that Merit’s new supervisor suggested minor corrections for the same project the previous supervisor condemned as “rubbish” indicated that the previous supervisor who demanded sex was not ready to help the student. Even as he described the work as rubbish, he did not attempt to provide Merit with any guidelines on improving the project. Antonia’s supervisor chose procrastination probably out of anger that the student was unwilling to accept his sexual advances. Ozy and her mates needed to visit their supervisor’s office more than three times before he could give them attention. However, she linked this delay to her unwillingness to offer sex to the lecturer. In all these accounts, the students were delayed, which they considered deliberate as part of revenge by the supervisors who could not receive the sex they demanded from the students.

A participant explained below that some of the lecturers were not determined to fail their students as a punishment for refusing them sex, rather, they would punish the latter with some sort of frustration.

... even though he said this [i.e., demanded sex] but he didn’t take it out on us [i.e., he did not fail the students]. But the only thing is that he would make sure that he frustrates you because people were graduating and we’re still in school even after those that entered after us. It’s so rampant (Hope).

The last participant to describe her experience under this theme was severely delayed by her project supervisor who warned her to stop talking about project in his office because she did not give him an immediate response to his request:

I came to his office, he told me he’s busy. That we should stop talking about project. That he was telling me that he likes me. ... I was just calm. I don’t want to shout. ... I was just saying yes sir, yes sir. It’s better that way. I cannot even tell him that I don’t want. I just told him that I would think about it. He told me that I shouldn’t just be thinking about it, that I should tell him (Mmachi).

Mmachi seemed uncomfortable with her supervisor’s suggestion of intimacy, but did not reject the demand either, rather, she chose to say “yes sir” to him even as she knew within herself that she did not want this. This

could be linked to fear of any consequences. Telling the supervisor that she “would think about it” seemed to have angered the lecturer who needed an outright response. This might have contributed to his reluctance to supervise Mmachi’s dissertation project, rather, he continued telling her he was busy each time she attended a supervision meeting.

Some of the experiences described by the current participants could be found in academic literature, although this particular issue remains under-researched. The issue of lack of interest in supervising a student after rejecting sexual advances seems similar to what Berlin (2006) reported about a radiology resident (female) who rejected sexual advances from her director (male) in the United States. Berlin (2006, p.288) noted that “the director began favoring other residents with regard to rotation and on-call assignments” after the student ignored all the different indicators of intimacy by the director and eventually reported the director to the department chair.

While such experiences in HEIs are scanty in academic literature, such literature is saturated with cases of workplace sextortion, such as when employers or bosses fire or frustrate their employees for not accepting the former’s sexual demands (see Basson, 2007; Cesario, 2020; Gary et al., 2001; Lundgren & Wieslander, 2024; Mellon, 2013) but this has been under-researched in academic settings. This is part of the “unfavourable treatment” referred to in sexual harassment definitions, particularly the “quid pro quo”, which has been previously defined in this report.

The experiences of the current participants indicate that what happens in the HEI environment is not too different from the issues in the workplace environment. In both settings, the culprits are the superiors to the victims; lecturers are superior to their students, just as employers or bosses are superior to their employees. Employers, managers or bosses expect their employees to provide them with sexual favours to be hired, trained, promoted, paid, or remain in the job, or threaten to do the opposite when the employee refuses to provide sexual favours when demanded. In the case of sextortion in the academic environment, the current data show that lecturers deliberately frustrated their students as the former seemed reluctant to offer the latter the support they needed when they needed it, which eventually delayed the students’ supposed progress. However, jeopardising academic progress was not the only issue relating to quid pro quo in this current study. Awarding poor marks to the students or failing them for rejecting sexual advances also fits the criteria for quid pro quo. The similarities between the workplace and academic environments appear striking regarding quid pro quo-related incidents.

## **7. Conclusion**

This current journal article has demonstrated how the academic life of female students is negatively impacted by sextortion perpetrated by their lecturers. The victims became lazy following sextortion. This laziness, however, was not caused by the sextortion itself but the threats that lecturers usually made to the students or the students’ perceptions that there would be consequences. The lecturers were fond of telling the students that they would not pass their assessment if they failed to engage in sexual activities with them. It was this threat that caused laziness in the victims, who believed that studying towards their assessments, attending lessons and other relevant activities were no longer important since these would not count towards their success. It appeared that even when a lecturer had not made such threats, the students who rejected their sexual advances lived in fear of the consequences, regardless, and might also develop academic laziness. This could be due to the common knowledge that those who previously rejected their lecturers’ sexual advances failed their courses.

Some of the victims of sextortion received marks they considered too poor, which they considered a punishment by the lecturers or a form of revenge for rejecting sexual advances. In some cases, however, this was also perceived as a means to force the student to visit the lecturer to discuss available options, so the lecturer could suggest sexual activities as the only option. Similarly, the lecturers deliberately delayed or ignored some of their academic responsibilities towards their students (such as feedback for their dissertation project) as a way of putting pressure on the students to meet for sex or as revenge for rejecting advances. The current data has also shown that the nature of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs was too strong to the extent that the victims were frustrated to the point they thought that dropping out of their courses would be the ultimate solution, as they were keen to end the unpleasant experiences.

### **7.1 Recommendations**

While multiple factors are responsible for sexual harassment incidents in Nigerian HEIs, strengthening educational policies on how lecturers should relate with their students and making clear typical behaviours that would be acceptable or unacceptable in an academic environment are likely to reduce the incidence of sextortion in such an environment. However, as Nigeria is widely acknowledged as a lawless society where both the least

educated and most educated violate many laws and policies, the institutional or departmental heads and leads should go beyond making policies to ensure that a strong task force is established for this purpose. The task force should monitor any developments relating to this phenomenon and make reporting the incidents easier for the victims.

However, it is to be acknowledged that sexual harassment policies exist in some of the institutions where these incidents are common, indicating that the lecturers, despite their high level of education, frequently violate such policies. This justifies my recommendation for a taskforce. The members of the taskforce should be carefully selected, ensuring that they involve staff members who have zero tolerance for sextortion, so they do not collude with the culprits as common with corrupt personnel. It is recommended that women be well represented in the taskforce as this is likely to encourage victims who are mostly female to approach the team. It is also necessary that HEIs run workshops or seminars for students or engage with them in some other ways (e.g., via posters, email, text messaging, etc.) on how to report incidents.

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#### Appendix: Interview Questions

1. What can you tell me about sextortion or sexual harassment perpetrated by your lecturers in terms of your academic life?
2. In what ways do you believe such lecturer's behaviour has affected your studies or academic activities?
3. What do you see as the damages this social problem has caused you as a student, and what do these mean to your supposedly academic success or failure?