

# “I have this Wedding Ring in my Bag all the Time”: How Female Students fake their Marital Status to evade Campus Sextortion

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## Abstract

Sextortion has remained a serious menace in many Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly the public ones. In these institutions, male lecturers target female students for sexual extortion and often threaten the students with fail should they reject the sexual advances. Due to the huge psychological and academic impacts of this sexual corruption on the victims, many victims and potential victims have come up with different tactics to evade the sexually extortionist behaviour. This current study explored how students dodged sextortion in HEIs in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 female undergraduates and graduates selected from five universities and two polytechnics. Thematic analysis was conducted and six themes were developed from the research data, which captured the recurrent patterns in the participants' efforts to evade sextortion. The themes are as follows: (i) *Avoiding personal contacts*; (ii) *Pretending to be married*; (iii) *Studying hard ahead of exams*; (iv) *Getting loved ones involved*; (v) *Sorting with cash*; and (vi) *Arranging sting operations and electronic recording*. Each of these themes captures a particular tactic used by a group of victims and potential victims of sextortion to prevent the act or escape it after already being targeted. Recommendations were made on how to address sextortion in the HEIs where this occurs.

**Keywords:** sextortion, sexual harassment, higher education institution, female students, lecturers.

**DOI:** 10.7176/JEP/16-7-08

**Publication date:** July 30<sup>th</sup> 2025

## 1. Introduction

Sexual extortion or sextortion is a globally recognised social problem that also cuts across different industries and sectors. News of employers, most often the male ones, sacking their employees (usually the female ones), demoting them or failing to promote them, for rejecting sexual advances or failing to provide sexual favours when demanded, is often reported. Recent developments, including activism or protests pioneered on social media with the hashtag #MeToo, have seen victims, including celebrities, sharing their personal experiences of sexual harassment, thereby creating more awareness of the extent of this act even in places where members of the public might not suspect such an act (see Gaal, 2020). Cuenca-Piqueras et al.'s (2023) review shows that Harvey Weinstein's case and the #MeToo movement have contributed to the research interest in sexual harassment. Some of these cases involved sextortion, which will be defined in the next paragraph.

While an increasing number of people and organisations have come to use the term sextortion to describe a form of online blackmail 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 definition in this current paper comes from the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ). This term was coined in 2008 by IAWJ to describe "the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage" (IAWJ, n.d., p.19). The term connects sex to extortion to describe how those in positions of authority extort sex from their subordinates. IAWJ, in its document, uses government officials, employers, and teachers as examples of the perpetrators who use their positions to demand sex from those under them. The involvement of authority figures in this act who seek a "sexual favor in exchange for exercising the power entrusted to him" (IAWJ, n.d., p.19) 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).

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). Sextortion by lecturers is often vaguely described as sexual harassment in academic literature. Bjarnegård et al. (2024) noticed this when discussing the sex-for-grades

incidents investigated by the BBC (2019) Africa Eye involving lecturers at the University of Lagos and the University of Ghana. They observed that although these cases involved lecturers putting pressure on their students to engage in sex to be able to earn their grades, the “behavior of the lecturers is described as sexual harassment, focusing on the currency of the exchange (sex), rather than on the abuse of entrusted power (giving out arbitrary grades)” (Bjarnegård et al., 2024, p.1354). Agazue (2025a; 2025b) observed that this is the case with numerous media and academic literature discussing such incidents in Nigeria. While this practice is widely known to be common in Nigerian HEIs, which many academics have also studied, the term “sextortion” is hardly seen in the existing publications; rather, sexual harassment is vaguely used. Thus, it has become imperative to call this sextortion specifically so that the audience can understand the severity of this act and the plight of the victims.

Sextortion in Nigerian HEIs is a very serious matter that has led to many victims dropping out and other victims struggling to graduate, as the lecturers deliberately fail them for rejecting sexual advances. This problem has generated protests across several HEIs and has led to numerous conferences by educators and stakeholders. In May 2016, the Nigerian Senate came up with a Bill, which would see offenders receiving a five-year jail term for sexually exploiting students, although the Bill did not pass through.

Many female undergraduates display hatred for this category of lecturers. Rumours of attempts to poison lecturers often spread among female students. When these lecturers die, their victims celebrate their deaths mostly on social media, which often triggers the *#MeToo* expressions. It is not uncommon for students and their parents or other well-wishers to “pray” for the death of these lecturers and when any of them coincidentally die, the “God of Vengeance” might be praised for doing the needful. In 2021, a Pentecostal pastor and the former president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Bishop Wale Oke bragged about how his prayers killed a lecturer (a Head of Department) at the University of Lagos who failed his “spiritual daughter” twice and swore that the lady would never graduate until she accepted his sexual advances. Bishop Oke described how the lady visited him to report this incident and wept while narrating her experience. Bishop Oke then described his reaction as follows:

“I stood on my feet and said, “O God, judge this matter.” ... Two weeks after, the lecturer and a girl he was sleeping with had an accident. They died along Lagos-Ibadan express. My God killed him.  
... (Oamen, 2021).

Lecturers, including prominent professors, have been suspended, sacked, arrested, prosecuted, and even jailed (Agazue, 2023a; Bamigbola, 2018) for sextortion. As a country notorious for jungle justice (see Agazue, 2023b; Ilori, 2020), lecturers have been beaten up and stripped naked by their victims and the victims’ neighbours in students’ private residences where the lecturers visited for sex. The jungle justice, however, has also been witnessed inside HEI environments, such as the case of students who partially stripped a senior lecturer of the Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, in May 2024 following accusations of sextortion.

This social problem has many negative impacts on the victims. The psychological (Agazue, 2025a; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Mondol et al., 2020) and academic (Bull, 2022; Farinloye & Omobuwa, 2016; Gyawali & Karki, 2023; Madani & Kazmi, 2023; Mondol et al., 2020; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010) impacts of this act have been widely studied. Targeted students take different measures to ensure that they are not violated in an act of sextortion. The measures taken by Nigerian students to evade sextortion have been hardly studied. This current study, therefore, aims to bridge such an important gap in knowledge. The objective of the study is to draw on the first-hand accounts of the victims and potential victims of sextortion through semi-structured interviews and media reports to demonstrate how students attempt to evade sextortion.

## 2. Sextortion and Sexual Harassment in Nigerian HEIs

In 2018, the names of several high-ranking academic staff, including professors at top Nigerian universities whose sextortion (often described as sexual harassment) cases 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 at the time, which eventually led them to identify a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, Dr Boniface Igbeneghu as one of the culprits. 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 sextortion of this nature in different news outlets and blogs described how they had similar experiences in what is popularly known as the *#MeToo* expressions.

In 2016, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) of Auchi Polytechnic dismissed 12 lecturers, demoted 16 and warned 4 due to their involvement in sextortion (Premium Times, 2016). In the same year, the disciplinary committee of Delta State University recommended the sack of 5 lecturers for sexual harassment of female students and monetary extortion of students for grades (Brisibe, 2016). About a year earlier, this same university dismissed 3 lecturers for similar offences, including one caught naked in the room of a final year female student (Brisibe, 2016). In 2019, the University of Ilorin recommended the dismissal of a lecturer who raped a female student in his office (Ekott, 2019). In that same year, Ekiti State University questioned a lecturer whose video appeared on the internet as he attempted to engage in sexual activities with a female student in return for a grade (Ekott, 2019). In 2022, the vice chancellor of the University of Abuja, Professor Abdul-Rasheed Na-Allah described how he dismissed two professors since his appointment as the vice chancellor (Vanguard, 2022).

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 (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 their institutions (see Muoghalu & Olaoeye, 2017). Further, the knowledge that some victims who reported their experiences were re-victimised by the perpetrators, their colleagues and other HEI staff (see 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 a monetary extortion (i.e., a demand for a monetary bribe) and end up as sexual extortion. While male lecturers financially exploit male students outright, the former may ask female students to pay cash as the first option and if 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, 2023a). This is in line with what Sundström & Wängnerud (2021, p.3) describe as a "double cost" while discussing how border officials asked male migrants to pay cash while requesting both 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 Naira on extortion per academic session (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 was hardly mentioned in 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". The exercise of power and authority indicates sextortion because the perpetrators were authority figures demanding sexual favours from those under them for personal gain. This is also the case with numerous studies on this social problem in Nigerian HEIs, which almost always describe the act as sexual harassment. However, some of the studies of this phenomenon in Nigerian HEIs included different perpetrators and some of them are not those in a position of authority (e.g., peers or coursemates) and this means that they are not qualified to be called sextortion. Having noted this, 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 experienced the physical types. While they investigated different perpetrators, they found lecturers to be the perpetrators in 59.7 percent of cases and 29.1 percent of the incidents occurred inside the 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 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 at their campuses. Slightly over 26 percent of the participants indicated that they knew other victims of sexual victimisation at 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 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. Ogunfowokan et al.'s (2023) 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.

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 (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 to address this problem, are connected to the endemic corruption and the power asymmetry that characterise the country. He further argues that the sexual harassment and exploitation of female students by male lecturers reflect the high-power distance in Nigerian society where a calibre of those in authority do not have much respect for those under them. In different sectors in Nigeria, cases of those in authority sexually harassing and abusing those under them are frequently witnessed (Agazue, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2016) and the victims hardly get justice due to police corruption that emboldens the offenders (Agazue, 2016). 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 sexual 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 also jailed for these offences (see Agazue, 2023a; Bamigbola, 2018; Brisibe, 2016; Ekott, 2019; Premium Times, 2016; Vanguard, 2022) by institutions who are determined to end this menace.

### **3. Measures to address Sextortion and Sexual Harassment in Nigerian HEIs**

Increasing incidences of sexual harassment and sextortion in Nigerian HEIs has sparked a debate and many have called for the criminalisation of sexual victimisation in HEIs (see Akpambang, 2021). As previously stated, a Bill was presented to the country's Senate on this in May 2016. However, the Academic Staff Union of Universities kicked against the Bill, arguing that it would undermine the autonomy of universities (Usman, 2018). The Bill was also described as restrictive for targeting only male lecturers for a behaviour that is so widespread in the country (Usman, 2018). In 2023, however, a group known as Anti-Sexual Harassment Advocacy Cluster asked the Nigerian president to give assent to the Bill for the purpose of deterring this offence after observing that this social problem has persisted (Odogwu, 2023).

There are several measures to address sexual harassment and sextortion in different Nigerian HEIs. While the authorities of some of the institutions are not proactive in addressing these issues, some appear proactive. Cases of both proactive and reactive measures have appeared in the media. In 2022, the vice chancellor of the University of Abuja, Prof. Abdul-Rasheed Na-Allah described his seriousness in addressing sextortion in the

institution (Vanguard, 2022). He described how the institution had partnered with some other organisations for the purpose of addressing this problem more effectively (Vanguard, 2022).

Several HEIs in the country have anti-sexual harassment policies. Akpambang (2021), for instance, details such policies put in place by several universities, including some of the prominent universities in the country, such as the University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, the University of Port Harcourt, and the University of Ibadan. Muoghalu & Olaoye (2017) observed that several other Nigerian universities have also developed policies aimed at tackling this menace. However, they also noted that “sexual harassment policies do not exist in most educational institutions in Nigeria”, which makes it difficult to prosecute offenders due to a lack of “defined structure” (Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017, p.141).

The University of Lagos has gone an extra “mile” to create what it terms a “participatory approach” to encourage students to speak against sexual harassment (see Akiyode-Afolabi et al., 2022). Sextortion by lecturers at the University of Lagos attracted greater public attention following the undercover investigation of Dr Boniface Igbeneghu by BBC (2019). In the aftermath of this exposé, the University of Lagos sought to encourage its students to report their victimisation and to seek support. Students were made to prepare placards with the following slogans:

“Don’t be silent, report sexual harassment cases. If you have been sexually harassed, visit UNILAG Counselling Unit”, “Don’t be ashamed of your story ...it will help inspire others”, “Speak up! It is not in vain...we must send a message across the world that there is no disgrace in being a survivor of sexual harassment”, “The fight is ours! The struggle is ours!”, “Keep it professional...Stop sexual harassment”, “Don’t cross the line...respect boundaries, stop sexual harassment”, “Dear Lecturer, don’t throw away years of hard work – because you could not keep your hands to yourself... #Be responsible”, “#Stop sexual harassment” (Akiyode-Afolabi et al., 2022).

The anti-sexual harassment policies in place in different universities are an indication that some university authorities are keen to address this menace. Some academic leaders have introduced or encouraged certain practices capable of preventing sextortion. For example, the vice-chancellor of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Professor Ignatius Onimawo described to the press how a computer-based examination he introduced addressed the issue of sextortion “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). This would normally save brilliant students who are deliberately failed by lecturers for sextortion. While this measure is commendable, it is to be acknowledged that examination is only one source out of several occasions that expose students to sextortion. Lecturers pick on students during laboratory workshops, project supervision and more (see Agazue, 2023a) and computer-based examinations cannot save such victims. Thus, authorities also need to find solutions to such situations.

Dissertation supervision gives the lecturers a huge opportunity for sextortion in Nigerian HEIs (see Agazue, 2023a; Salaudeen, 2018; Usman, 2018). In addition to dissertation supervision, Agazue (2023a) also discovered that the supervision of laboratory workshops and similar workshops also provides an opportunity. These activities in Nigerian HEIs require that the lecturer interact with the student on a one-to-one basis in ways that are not necessary during typical classroom teaching. Most of Agazue’s (2023a) participants on the facilitating factors of sexual harassment in Nigerian HEIs mentioned dissertation supervision as a situation that was almost inescapable. It was inescapable not only because the supervisor must meet the student one-to-one but also because an aggrieved supervisor, i.e., one whose sexual advances were turned down might take revenge by not providing the student adequate guidance, failing the student or offering her a very poor mark when marking the assessment (Agazue, 2025b).

Recent developments in certain HEIs indicate that HEI authorities know about sextortion connected to dissertation supervision and some of them have taken actions towards addressing this. For example, following numerous accusations against a certain professor connected to dissertation supervision, the vice chancellor of the University of Calabar, Professor Florence Obi described to Channels Television presenters the strategies the university employed to save potential victims of sextortion connected to dissertation supervision in the Faculty of Law following protests by students and the second suspension of a professor many students accused of sextortion:

“We have about seven committees in place. There is a committee to assign students to supervisors because there are accusations that the suspended dean took all female students to supervise and that made them vulnerable to his advances. Now, there is a committee to handle that (Victor, 2023).



Since these offences are gendered, the Law Faculty of the University of Calabar has also put another strategy in place with this in mind. According to the vice chancellor, Professor Obi, “women have now been appointed as principal officers as part of efforts to curb sexual harassment in the Faculty” (Victor, 2023). This development is similar to the development at the Obafemi Awolowo University in recent years. While responding to a serious accusation of sextortion by a certain lecturer at the institution, the university’s public relations officer, Abiodun Olarewaju assured concerned persons that the victim would definitely see justice, stating that the institution had opened a “gender centre”, which “aimed at creating unfettered access to justice” (Alabi, 2020).

Some universities have resorted to sting operations as a way of addressing sextortion incidents. These are usually done to produce evidence against lecturers the authorities have identified as suspects. Daily Trust presented a case of sting operations at the University of Abuja where the authorities tried to produce evidence against Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, Professor A. A. Adeniji whom a female student had earlier reported (Ibrahim, 2019). Police were involved in this operation which took place in a hotel in Abuja where the lecturer visited to have sex with the student (Ibrahim, 2019). The lecturer was eventually caught after undressing himself to have sex with the student. A similar sting operation also involved Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria where a lecturer was caught in a hotel trying to have sex with a student he had threatened to fail unless she agreed to his sexual demands (Ibrahim, 2019). Daily Trust also reported similar incidents involving this same university, which yielded successful outcomes (see Ibrahim, 2019).

Although many HEIs have put relevant policies and strategies in place after recognising sexual harassment as an impediment to students’ success, having policies does not necessarily mean that the issue is being adequately addressed. Nigerian society in general is often regarded as a “lawless society” due to the ways citizens break laws and rules. Nigeria is also well-known for endemic corruption (see Agazue, 2015; Agazue, 2021; Momah, 2013; Smith, 2007) endorsed by many individuals and institutions. Many individuals and institutions have little regard for due process. This can partly explain why sexual harassment and sextortion in HEIs have remained a serious problem despite all the policies in place in some of the institutions. The pervasiveness of the sextortion committed by many lecturers in itself reflects the high level of lawlessness in the country. Further, the corruption that allows authority figures to get away with certain offences inadvertently encourages such illicit activities.

Several experts in this field believe that academic institutions are not doing enough to curb this menace. For example, the former acting executive secretary of the Nigerian Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), Louis Eriomala stated that higher institutions “are not doing enough” to address this issue (Blueprint, 2021). While multiple factors could be responsible for the reluctance to address this menace, it is also possible that some of the influential lecturers who are involved in these offences might be reluctant to address them due to the benefits to themselves. Africa Polling Institute (2019) suggests, based on anecdotal evidence that the authorities of some institutions fail to admit allegations of sexual harassment and abuse “in the spirit of collegial camaraderie”. Further, some of the victims of these offences “who reported such cases are further victimized by the same academics, their colleagues, and often the institutions” (Africa Polling Institute, 2019).

Nevertheless, some of the institutions have done so well in combating this social problem. Frequently, the details of dozens of lecturers being sacked or arrested for these offences appear in the news. Cases of dismissals, arrests, prosecutions and convictions are not uncommon (see Agazue, 2023a; Bamigbola, 2018; Brisibe, 2016; Ekott, 2019; Premium Times, 2016; Vanguard, 2022). These suggest that the authorities of such institutions are not ready to condone such offenders in the name of collegiality. Arguably, this can be attributed to the personalities of the individuals designated to review and investigate cases reported to them. One might not expect much success when those who commit sextortion are among such designated persons. Those who have zero tolerance for such behaviour would be expected to deal with offenders decisively and according to the existing policy of the institution.

While some institutions are proactive in addressing this social problem, it seems that many institutions only react when pressure intensifies or in the public interest, especially when their victims have made 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. HEIs should be more proactive in addressing this menace.

#### 4. Theoretical Discussion: Patriarchal Operations

Numerous literature on sextortion and sexual harassment suggests that these are “gendered” phenomena (see Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Livholts et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2020) and women make up the vast majority of victims in different industries or sectors, including entertainment (Gaal, 2020; Hennekam & Bennett, 2017; Korzec, 2006; Samuel-Okon, 2024), hospitality or tourism (Chela-Alvarez et al., 2024; Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Jung & Yoon, 2020; Kensbock et al., 2015; Mensah, 2022; Nimri et al., 2020), education (Athanasziades et al., 2023; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Jones et al., 2024; Office for Students, 2024; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Wood et al., 2021) and others. Some scholars have identified such sexual harassment as a part of the “ongoing sexism” in certain professions (Lu et al., 2020).

Additionally, unequal power stands out in many incidents of sexual harassment or sextortion (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017). Sexual harassment is said to be “a symptom of social inequalities” (Burn, 2019). Catherine MacKinnon’s work, as observed by Anderson (2006), presents sexual harassment as “sexual conduct that men impose on women because they are women”. These observations make patriarchy a relevant theoretical standpoint in this current discussion. Walby (1989, p.213) describes patriarchy as “an essential tool in the analysis of gender relations”. Similarly, Bjarnegård et al. (2024) argue that one cannot understand sexual corruption well without drawing on the theoretical tools that are utilised in the analysis of gender norms in general and gender-based violence in particular. Patriarchy is one of the tools that are widely used to study these phenomena. Patriarchy is a system under the domination of men and where masculinity is seen as more valuable than femininity (Embry & Lyons, 2012). Nash (2009, p.102) defines patriarchy as “an analytical concept referring to a system of political, social, and economic relations and institutions structured around the gender inequality of socially defined men and women”.

From the above definitions, it is arguable that patriarchy is responsible for the gender inequality and its consequences on women. Women have fought against their oppression and struggled for equality for centuries. While they have been lucky to win some battles, including equal access to education and the right to vote, they proportionally remain at the receiving end of all forms of discrimination and violence (Council of Europe, n.d.). While the liberation of women from the private spheres in which they were confined for so long is widely hailed as a historical achievement, Walby (1989) observed that such liberation has created another problem for women, stating that having been liberated from home, women are currently subjected to exploitation by the entire society. This observation applies to this current study. Education can be considered as part of the liberation of women from home whereby they can gain academic knowledge and skills that would enable them to get a good job and earn a decent living. Unfortunately, while liberated from home, women’s presence in educational establishments has become another source of exploitation and subjugation. In many HEIs around the world, female students are sexually exploited and the perpetrators may use sexual violence or the threat of it to make the former feel powerless and ashamed.

Sexual corruption is described as “a manifestation of gender-based violence, is inherently a human rights violation” (Coleman et al., 2024, p.1209). Pacilli et al. (2024, p.533) describe sextortion as “a form of gender-based violence that occurs within the specific context of corruption”. Sexual corruption or sextortion in Nigerian HEIs discussed in this journal article is no different. Focusing on feminist theory in their empirical research paper on sexual harassment of Nigerian female students by their male lecturers, Muoghalu and Olaoye (2017, p.11) argue “that sexual harassment thrives in Nigerian university as a result of the fact that women are seen culturally as people to be exploited and which is partly a product of women’s inferior social status”. This argument corresponds with Muoghalu and Olaoye’s (2017) empirical findings on the subject after their participants presented disrespect for women as one of the major factors promoting sexual harassment on their campuses.

Based on the outcome of their study on sexual harassment in HEIs involving both male and female students, Athanasziades et al. (2023) stated that “female gender per se is a predictive factor for experiencing sexual harassment”. Being female 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 female. 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, found that male lecturers did this “to exercise their power and authority over the female students”. Up to 62% of the 1,800 female participants in Ijitona et al.’s (2018) study believed that this act by male lecturers was a way of exercising their power over the subjects, i.e., female students. It is worth stating that some of these studies also investigated sextortion, even though the term “sexual harassment” was used.

## 5. Methods

### 5.1 Research Design

This current study is based on the phenomenological approach. This approach focuses on the 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 aim was to gain in-depth insights into how the victims and potential victims of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs attempt to escape the act with the use of linguistic data.

### 5.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Primary data were the main source of data in this current study because the researcher needed first-hand accounts of the phenomenon from individuals who experienced sextortion. The accounts of the participants, however, were corroborated with secondary data from the media where necessary. Purposive sampling was employed in this study. 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). The female victims and potential victims of sextortion in the hands of male lecturers in different HEIs in the southeastern part of Nigeria were purposively recruited.

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 how they dodged sextortion in-depth (see appendix). A total of 45 participants (aged 18 to 32) took part in the interviews. The participants were all women, comprising graduates and undergraduates of different HEIs. The participants came from a total of 7 institutions, consisting of 5 universities and 2 polytechnics.

### 5.3 Ethical Considerations

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. Although this device was owned and accessed by the researcher only, he ensured to protect it with a password to safeguard 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 their names and any other personal details would be removed. Thus, their real names were replaced with pseudonyms.

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 during the interviews, in case any of them showed signs of psychological breakdown. He planned to terminate the interview should this happen, but none of the participants showed signs of distress during the interviews.

### 5.4 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed in this report. 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 them 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

A total of six themes were developed from the data. There are two parts to the victims' experiences discussed in this journal article. The first part relates to what can be regarded as "preventive measures", i.e., what the students did to avoid sextortion in the first place. The second part is about "remedies", i.e., what the students did to free themselves from having sexual activities with the lecturer after the lecturer had already picked on them. What this means to the current data is that both victims and non-victims (those who perceived themselves as potential victims) participated in this study. However, it is important to note that some of those in the first part also ended up in the second part, i.e., while they took preventive measures to avoid being picked on, they were eventually picked on.

Further, it is difficult to say that all the participants in the second part were victims of sextortion due to the nature of certain experiences they reported. For example, some of the participants were worried or lived in fear and started seeking solutions after the lecturers told them to meet them in the office. This fear was connected to frequent reports of students being asked out, indecently touched, kissed, groped, or raped in lecturers' offices (see Agazue, 2023a; Agazue, 2025a; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Salaudeen, 2018). Some lecturers did not engage the students sexually in their offices but used the office as a private place to make arrangements for this, such as asking the student to meet in a hotel or somewhere else (Agazue, 2023a). While the students' fears were understandable, the invitation to the office in itself does not qualify as sextortion since one could not be sure why the lecturer invited the student.

Below are the six themes developed from the current data. Each theme was introduced and supported with verbatim quotes from the participants. The themes were interpreted, and where necessary, the themes were discussed alongside existing studies and media reports on the subject. The findings were theoretically explained.

### 6.1 Avoiding personal contacts

The current participants indicated that coming into personal contact with their lecturers provided an avenue for the lecturers to get to know them and make sexual advances. To avoid this, these students stayed vigilant, avoiding personal contacts with the lecturers in all settings where they thought the lecturer could notice them – from the classroom to the canteen, pathways, and more. Two participants described how they skipped classes to avoid being noticed by the lecturers. It is worth stating that the students were not fond of skipping their classes; rather, they skipped specific classes managed by the particular lecturers they identified as involved in sexual extortion.

We would be missing classes just not to see them. You're running away from not having these issues. Actually, it's difficult to see how to manoeuvre because it's either you accept within you that you want to fail this course and pray that by next year they will give it to someone that is good or you just do what they do [offer sex], what they're telling you to do. It's difficult to avoid. ... (Judith).

The second participant, Amaka suspected that the lecturer had noticed her in the class previously and was trying to reach out to her, leading to her skipping the lecturer's classes:

I avoided lectures because of the man. He was coming for me. He didn't know my number [admission number] but he knows me in person and that's why I avoided lectures, so he doesn't see me (Amaka).

Kaima suspected that her lecturer might be looking for an opportunity to discuss sex with her, having noticed her in the classroom earlier and invited her to his office, which she refused. Kaima used to see the lecturer in different places within the university premises, such as the canteen, and alleyways and to save herself from sexual extortion, she developed the habit of running as she believed that the lecturer was likely to make sexual advances. Two other participants also described how they avoided their lecturer's offices or dodged them elsewhere.

Just to keep avoiding them anywhere you see them. I ran a lot. Hahaha. I'm telling you the truth. Imagine a student, you keep running. You know when you could see your lecturer, imagine a student who is sound academically, answering questions in class, even when your lecturer says "see me in my office", your mind is already there. "Bring this to my office, let's talk about it", I wouldn't go even if one could have been genuine, you wouldn't know which one is genuine, which one is not genuine (Kaima).

So one day I was in class, the course rep said he [lecturer] was looking for me. ... My friend that came with me. ... As we were going back [leaving the lecturer's office] ... he spoke in a dialect I understand, which my friend wouldn't have understood. So he said when I go out, I should come back without my friend. So, hahaha! ... I told my friend what this man said, that I had to return back without her. ... So I started avoiding him. Anytime, anywhere, anything near him, people are passing through that place, if I see him up there, I would turn back and take another direction (Genny).

As for me, I don't even go to lecturers' office because of fear of being noticed and everything. I don't go around them either. I just avoid them whenever I come across them be it on the bus, restaurant and wherever to avoid stories that touch the heart (Praise).

The references to the lecturer's office above could be connected to the frequent reports of sexual victimisation in those offices where students are sometimes forcefully kissed, hugged, groped or raped (see Agazue, 2023a; Deji-Folutile, 2024; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010). 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). On the BBC (2019) Africa Eye's report, one could see Dr Igbeneghu asking a student to switch off the light, lock the door and expect a kiss. Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo's (2010) study found that 29.1 percent of sexual harassment and assault incidents among their 398 participants took place in lecturers' offices.

Two participants described below how they avoided their lecturers whenever they saw them outside the classroom. Unlike Kaima and Genny, who their lecturers had already spoken to, which prompted them to run or hide whenever they saw the lecturers, the 3 participants whose words were presented below had not been approached by their lecturers, but since they had already identified these particular lecturers as some of those into sextortion, they started dodging them:

After lectures, I went to the canteen. So after eating in the canteen ... on my way coming back, I did not see him on time because what I used to do is whenever I saw him, I would go back and pass through another way because I don't want any personal interactions with him. I tried to avoid contact with him after class because there's no way you can avoid that class contact (Faith).

I don't like interfering with male lecturers. I avoid them because I don't want any stories like that. Whenever I see them, I just turn the other way or pretend as if I didn't see them just in case. That's how to survive them (Hope).

The last participant whose experience is analysed under this theme considered dodging sexually deviant lecturers as one of the vital skills female students enrolling into Nigerian HEIs should possess or develop:

Actually, a student coming into higher institution here, it's not just trying his or her best to meet up with grades and all that, which is the basic thing you came for, you also try to learn how to dodge this sort of thing and if you don't dodge them, you either, you know, you'll start having all these problems, or you yield in just to survive (Bene).

As demonstrated by previous studies on this subject, personal contact with lecturers is one of the numerous factors that precipitate sexual victimisation (Agazue, 2023a), and the current students seemed to be aware of this, as indicated in their responses under this theme. In Agazue's (2023a) study, participants described how activities that brought them one-on-one with their lecturers (e.g., laboratory workshop and project supervision) made them so vulnerable that escape was almost impossible for some of them. Personal contact is a very important factor when discussing sexual victimisation. Obviously, one cannot victimise a person whom one cannot physically meet. However, physical presence does not guarantee an opportunity for sexual victimisation, even for someone looking for such an opportunity, such as the case with classrooms where students (potential victims) were present but could not be approached by their lecturers.

It seems that sexual victimisation in certain contexts, such as the workplace and educational institutions, demands both personal contact and some degree of privacy. Both factors are available to employers who sexually harass their employees. In the HEI environment, as previously stated, such an opportunity becomes available to lecturers when targeted victims visit their offices, when the former supervises the latter's project, or meet somewhere they could interact without others hearing their conversations. Traditional classroom teaching might not create a space for sexual advances because of the presence of other students. Most people would normally discuss sexual matters or make sexual advances to someone in private, and this might explain why the sexual victimisation experienced by students often occurred in lecturers' offices. Further, some targeted victims were approached in canteen premises and alleyways. Although some of these places appear even more open than

classrooms, it is understood that classrooms, due to their nature, might arouse suspicion when a lecturer tries to discuss sexual matters with a student, unlike a canteen where different persons or groups move around and discuss different matters.

The role of personal contact has featured in academic literature. Berlin (2006, p.265) described the case of a radiology resident (female) sexually harassed by her director (male), noting that the nature of the resident's roles during her first year "not allowed her much opportunity to have personal contact with the director of the residency program". Her second year, however, "was the period in her training when the resident was to spend considerable time in the section where the director himself was the head" (Berlin, 2006, p.2006, p.288). That was when the harassment started, as the director had the opportunity to work alone with the resident, where he could say anything he wanted to the resident without distractions. Bull & Page (2021) provided a detailed account of how project supervision could make a student vulnerable to what they term "grooming" by their lecturers during the process. The experiences described in these reports were similar to those discussed by Agazue's (2023a) participants who were victims of sextortion in the hands of their dissertation project and laboratory supervisors.

These can be partly explained by the gendered power relations between the female students and their male supervisors. Sexual harassment has been described as part of the "ongoing sexism" in certain settings (Lu et al., 2020). In many cases of sexual harassment, unequal power often stands out (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017) and this was the case between the lecturers and their students in this current study. The lecturers were too powerful and could punish the students in some ways, which might put fear into the students to do the former's bidding. With endemic corruption in Nigeria and the fact that these lecturers get away with these offences in many HEIs, the consequences to the victims have been found to be huge, including dropping out, being awarded a low grade or failed outright even after doing well academically (see Agazue, 2025b). Students perceive disrespect for women as a major factor in sextortion perpetrated by male lecturers (Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017). These are all indicative of the patriarchal operations that damage academic institutions and their students.

### *6.2 Pretending to be married*

Several participants in this study described how they pretended to be married women to save themselves from sextortion. This was based on the belief that lecturers targeted unmarried women. Although some students believed that faking married status would save them, the accounts by other students indicated that this did not always work. While some lecturers might want to stay away from married women due to personal values, others targeted any women they found sexually appealing, even when it was obvious that the woman was married. From the data, it appeared that the students presented themselves as married women due to cultural norms in society that often protect married women from sexual advances. Nenyé used word of mouth to inform her lecturer that she was married after he demanded sex from her, but she also seemed suspicious that the man might not believe her, thus, she added a superstitious tale to it:

He said I should pay for hotel and wait for him there. Hmm. The way I escaped is that I told him that I'm married and in my village, they did something that anybody who have sex with married woman will die. Hahaha! I'm not married or anything but you have to find a way of setting yourself free from these lecturers. So that's what I did and he said I should not worry (Nenyé).

The wearing of wedding ring was commonplace among some of the students who seemed to believe that the lecturers would refrain from sexual advances after noticing the ring:

I have this wedding ring in my bag all the time. See it here [she showed the interviewer the ring]. My friends also have these rings. I put it on when going to lectures for some of them just to make sure they don't pick on me (Chinny).

My girlfriend [female friend] started wearing wedding ring. He met one lecturer and she told him, "please see my wedding ring, I'm married". He told me "Ruth [not real name], I'm tired". She had to go and meet him cos she has failed this man's course three times. Three times! She said she would wear ring and go and meet him. She gave me some ideas and I also started wearing it when one lecturer like that started misbehaving (Blessing).

Blessing's emphasis on the number of times her friend failed the lecturer's course related to her strong belief that the lecturer failed the student repeatedly due to his determination to have sex with the student. Often, students did not believe that they failed their courses; rather, they believed that the lecturers deliberately marked them down as a way of putting pressure on the students to visit them to discuss the solution, which might end up with sexual demands (see Agazue, 2023a; Folarin, 2017).

Another tactic the participants described was attending lessons or visiting lecturers' offices with a child. Although not every woman seen with a child is presumed married or the mother of the child, childbearing is most often connected to marital status in the Nigerian society, and it was this norm that the students exploited. Many public HEIs in the country do not have security features that would restrict access to classrooms to authorised persons. Thus, students sometimes take a friend, colleague, family member, child and others to their classes. The current participants attended lessons with a child and interacted with the child in ways that could suggest that the student was the mother of the child.

If you come here, you will see girls coming to lectures with kids. They're their friends' kids or their sisters' kids. They do this for the lecturers so that they will think they're married, something like that. ... I'm not an exception either because sometime ago when the heat was too much from this stupid man [lecturer], I took my niece to his lecture and we stayed in front seat so he could see me well with that child (Naza).

Some of them [female students] will carry another person's child and enter their offices just to make the man [lecturer] think they're married. I also had to do this to set myself free (Nnenna).

Adunni, however, took a different approach from her peers – visiting her lecturer with a male friend to pretend she had a husband:

One time like that when the man [lecturer] told me to come and meet him in his office. Hmm! I was like I don't want to be the next victim now because my friend was still battling with this at the time and it was causing hell lot of problems to her. Then I thought I should play smart. What did I do? Then I brought one young man with me to pretend as husband and wife. Hahaha! The guy is just my neighbour like that. We're close but nothing like that [not couple]. You have to do this to survive this kinda lecturer (Adunni).

While cultural norms about having sexual activities with a married woman might have encouraged female students to pretend to be married so the lecturers would spare them, Kech suggested that there is another factor that forces lecturers to avoid married women:

When a girl fails exam and go to a lecturer to sort it out or something like that. Then if the girl is beautiful, the lecturer will start to make advances on her. She may yield in ... and nobody will know about their affairs. The one that normally goes public is when the girl wanted to maintain her ground and the lecturer continued to pressure her like those women who are married. Then it will come out in the open (Kech).

Kech's words seemed to suggest that married women work so hard to resist the lecturers' sexual demands, probably in their determination to maintain their marital vow and such effort could mean that such women are likely to report the incident to higher authorities or members of the public – something that is uncommon among unmarried students, which could put the lecturer in trouble. A quantitative study of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities found that students who appeared younger and unmarried were the most sexually harassed (Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010). Younger students might appear more attractive than older ones and be targeted. Further, although any adults could be married or unmarried, it is easy to consider a younger woman as single compared to an older woman. Mumford et al.'s (2020) study of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the United States found that the chances of reporting sexual harassment by younger adults were up to 105 percent compared to the chances by their older counterparts, while the chances of reporting sexual assault by the former were up to 65 percent compared to the latter. Mumford et al. did not find any significant differences between college students and non-students in the rates of sexual harassment and sexual assault. This suggests that appearing young in itself is a factor, irrespective of whether the individual was a student or not.

The findings of the current study not only support the existing studies on this subject, particularly the study by Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo (2010) that involved Nigerian HEIs but they also provided deep insights into why unmarried students were preyed on more often than their married counterparts, making the former to pretend to be married to be able to dodge sextortion. However, while the different tactics discussed above worked for the students, evidence from other students shows that they did not always work. Ugochi's words below suggest that some of the lecturers suspected that targeted students used wedding rings to avoid sextortion when they were not married:

Some students wear wedding rings cos of this. But some lecturers don't even care about these things. They would tell you to go and remove that thing, that you're not married, you're just using this thing to dodge (Ugochi).

A similar situation was also described by Lydia. However, it was unclear whether the lecturer considered the students as faking marriage or he did not care whether anyone was married or not.

Once we heard about the man's escapades, ehm, methods, ehm, most of the students started wearing engagement ring or wedding ring to attend class but that did not even solve the problem because once he puts eyes on you, it doesn't solve the problem. It's either you prepare yourself for the failure or you do what others do (Lydia).

Similarly, word of mouth did not work for some students who tried to convince their lecturers that they were married. Abeni drew on her friend's experience to highlight the limitations of such a strategy:

I had this friend of mine, she gave money but that's not enough. So she had to tell the man that she's married and the man said "okay, that it's unfortunate that you didn't tell me on time, you're fake". It was not funny at all! (Abeni).

Cynthia drew on the case of a lecturer who was later sacked to illustrate how some lecturers did not care about the marital status of some of their targets. Her words also show how a sexually harassing lecturer could be punished by the university authority when the victim had some form of "connections" at the institution:

Even if you like wear something that is floating on the floor, this is a man trying to sleep with pregnant women. So there's nothing you could do to escape him. The reason he was removed entirely from our department is that he was targeting the wife of one man whose cousin is working in our school (Cynthia).

When discussing some of the recent cases that appeared in the media, a named graduate of Business Administration who was a victim of sextortion described how it was difficult for anyone to escape sextortion from the set of lecturers who were into this:

Everyone is a target of sexual harassment; both the single and married ladies are prey to these lecturers. Some force these students to pay for the hotel rooms where the sex would take place. Some wicked lecturers, after having sex and making the students go through humiliation, still fail them (Deji-Folutile, 2024).

While some lecturers might respect married women due to personal values or cultural norms, the latter responses indicate that some lecturers were exceptional. In a previous study on this subject, Agazue (2023a) identified what he terms "obsession" from his data. This refers to the idea that some lecturers were sexually obsessed with some students, and that they were determined to engage in sexual activities with them. A comment made some years ago by Professor Ngozi Illoh of the University of Benin, a member of the ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) gender equality commission, while responding to the frequent cases of sexual harassment of female students, suggests this obsession recently validated by Agazue (2023a). In the comment, Illoh stated that "many male lecturers simply want to 'conquer' and 'boast' about how many girls they have succeeded in 'tasting'" (Fatunde, 2018).

While academic studies on sextortion, often called sexual harassment in HEIs abound, it is difficult to come across existing literature on how student victims of sextortion try to dodge by wearing wedding or engagement rings, attending classes with a child or visiting their lecturers with a male friend. Nevertheless, literature on this can be found with respect to women pretending to be married or connected to a certain man to dodge sexual harassment. Lennox (2024), for instance, discussed how a racially diverse sample of her participants chose to wear wedding rings, displayed affection for men and held the hands of their male friend in public places as a way to dodge sexual harassment. She observed that by adopting these tactics, "women strive to communicate their sexual unavailability; signal the existence of a protector; and eschew sexist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic violence" (Lennox, 2024, p.973).

Lennox's notion of "sexual unavailability" can be somewhat linked to patriarchal operations. Patriarchy is a system under the domination of men (Embry & Lyons, 2012), as previously discussed. Across many histories and cultures, women are traditionally viewed as creatures who are under men; thus, it is customary for men to approach women to discuss sexual matters or demand sexual activities (Agazue, 2025a). Although discussing sexual matters is not the same as sexual harassment. Agazue (2025a, p.149) argues that sexual harassment occurs in the process because "not all men are gentlemen". As women are expected to be under men, the wearing of a wedding or an engagement ring, and holding a man's hand would indicate that the targeted woman is already under a man, which could ward off a poacher.



### 6.3 Studying hard ahead of exams

Studying hard when the examination was approaching was another tactic described by some of the participants. This is based on the idea that failing an assessment is one of the factors that lead to sexual demands by lecturers who present sex to the student as a quick option to pass their assessment. Much has appeared in both academic and media literature about the targeting of weak students or students considered academically lazy, for sextortion (see Agazue, 2023a; Agazue, 2025a; Onyechere, 2018; Udechukwu et al., 2020) and the particular measures taken by the students under this theme suggest that they were aware of this and tried to evade sextortion by studying hard. Only two participants stated that they adopted this method.

I'm just reading so hard now ahead of this exam just in case these lecturers start their rubbish. I really don't want anything to bring me to their attention this time (Juliet).

He made me feel like, okay, I feel like let me not get into this man's hot soup. Let me just be reading ahead of classes so they won't be anything like "come to my office to discuss your result" or something like that (Lolade).

While only two participants took this particular measure, there have been many reports in the media regarding how failing assessments bring students to the attention of lecturers who sexually extort them. One of the student victims of the UNILAG lecturer (Dr Boniface Igbeneghu) investigated by BBC (2019) Africa Eye, mentioned weak students as the predominant victims of the lecturer:

He likes to pick on struggling students because he knows that they are very vulnerable and there's nothing they can do (BBC, 2019).

The former executive secretary of the National Universities Commission, Professor Peter Okebukola blamed academically weak students for the menace of "sex-for-marks" in Nigerian universities: "All those girls who run after those lecturers or can be harassed by lecturers are those who are academically weak" (Onyechere, 2018). He added that such students are desperate to offer sex to lecturers even when the latter seem uninterested. Similarly, Louis Eriomala, the former acting executive secretary of the Nigerian Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) noted more recently that "there are situations where the lazy female student lures an unwilling lecturer" and also "cases where a randy lecturer lures an unwilling lazy female student" (Blueprint, 2021). While this is a factor with empirical support, Professor Okebukola's statement seems problematic because he presented it as a sole factor without acknowledging that multiple factors are at play, such as situations where academically sound and hardworking students are forced into sextortion by their lecturers out of obsession (Agazue, 2023a).

Agazue's (2023a) interviews of student victims of sexual harassment at the hands of their lecturers also found that several participants mentioned failed assessment as a factor facilitating sexual exchanges between the students and lecturers. However, unlike some of the factors where lecturers force students into sexual activities against their will, the case with failed students appeared consensual more often, but this is not to claim that all the students consented or that they were happy with this. He found that failed students approached their lecturers to discuss solutions to their failed assessments, and some of them were receptive to the sexual demands as a trade-off when the lecturers presented sex as an option. Muoghalu & Olaoye's (2017) empirical study found that desperation to pass assessments could encourage sexual exploitation. While speaking to the Sunday Sun on the issue of "sorting" (paying for grades in cash or kind) in Nigerian HEIs, the vice chancellor of Osun State University, Professor Odunayo Adebayo noted that this practice holds due to students who consider themselves academically weak and try to induce lecturers when they fail, further stating that students who consider themselves academically strong do not make such move (Omegoh et al., 2023). Aina-Peleemo et al. (2021) have used the term "sexual bribery" to describe this situation, noting that this seems to have become normalised among corrupt lecturers and their students. It is, however, worth stating that the sexual aspect of sorting mostly applies to female students under male lecturers, while male students most often sort with cash.

However, there is no evidence to suggest that students who approached their lecturers after failing their assessments did so to engage in sexual activities with the lecturers to be able to pass. Some students could contact their lecturers with a genuine intention of establishing what they needed to do to pass their failed assessments without sexual activities in mind, but the lecturer might misinterpret such contact to mean that the student had come to pay him for marks with sex and might start making sexual demands (Agazue, 2023a). This also featured in the findings by BBC (2019) Africa Eye when a student who attempted suicide following repeated molestation by her lecturer said, "I never ever give my consent once". With the knowledge of such ugly situations, the current participants wanted to work hard in the first place as they believed that this could work for

them, i.e., saving them from meeting their lecturers for solutions, at which point the lecturers might try to take advantage of their vulnerability.

#### *6.4 Getting loved ones involved*

This theme was developed because the participants' words indicated that some of them had involved their parents, friends or priests/pastors to help them come out of their predicament. Each victim thought of the right person to get involved and the role the person could play to get the matter resolved. Some participants asked their loved ones to meet the lecturers to plead with them, while others contacted their loved ones for advice or psychological support. Anna considered her mum an appropriate person to plead with the lecturer to stop demanding sex from her:

This man is just so wicked. Everything I begged this man for months, the man refused. Do you know that I had to bring my mum there [university] before the thing stopped? My mum came to that school and knelt down. Her two knees were on the floor and she's begging and crying. That moved the man and the thing stopped that day (Anna).

For Lovina and Suzzy, they visited their lecturers' offices with their friends as a way of resolving their matters:

He said I should come to school the next day. I told my girlfriend [female friend] and she said I should go with her. So both of us went to his office. When I went to his office, my girlfriend stood outside. ... (Lovina).

After my defence, the day I went to his office again, I made sure I went with someone. My friends had told me the way this man was looking at me, this man might demand for something else. So I stay far away (Suzzy).

He called my phone several times. ... He then said I should meet him so so place. I told him I was busy but he insisted that I should finish up and meet him there. ... I was panicking because I knew a day like this will come. He has my project and not guiding me. ... I told a course mate of mine and she told me that he was like "Onyinye [not real name], nothing will happen. ... Onyinye don't panic" (Chita).

When we finished lecture, he said my face was not familiar, that I should meet him in his office. Then immediately, fear begin to catch me ... Then I talked to my girlfriend [female friend] and she told me she has heard a lot about that man about his nonsense. ... that increased my fear even more. ... My heart started beating fast and I was like not me again. ... But then another friend just tell me to go first instead of being there killing yourself and thinking about dropping out (Vivian).

Lovina's and Suzzy's lecturers invited them to their offices, and although the lecturers did not disclose their reasons for the invitations, the students were suspicious and made arrangements to safeguard themselves. The suspicion could be linked to cases of students being asked for sexual relationships or activities, groped, fondled, sexually attacked or raped inside lecturers' offices (see Agazue, 2023a; Agazue, 2025a; Ekott, 2019; Owoaje & Olusola-Taiwo, 2010; Salaudeen, 2018). Hence, when students were not sure of any legitimate reasons their lecturer wanted to see them in their offices, they suspected sexual advances. Vivian's lecturer considered her face unfamiliar; thus, he wanted to see her. Agazue (2023a) has previously discovered how lecturers pick on "freshers" and how potential victims who had been told about this group of lecturers try to keep their distance from such lecturers.

Although the victims of these sexual offences invited someone they trusted to help them to plead with the lecturer, or at least distract the lecturer, some victims seemed to have told their loved ones for information purposes only, while also discouraging them not to meet or contact the lecturer for fear of any consequences:

I told my aunty what was happening and she said that I should give him the man's name. I was so scared because if I give him the man's name, maybe it will become a problem (Anuri).

I told my mum, my mum entered prayer. I told that my aunty. She said she would call someone that knows the head of department and I told her "please!" I was just that scared (Ada).

Although Ada did not want her aunt to get involved, her mum said prayers for her, and it might be for that reason that she informed her mum of the development. It was also possible that the victims who did not want their loved ones to confront the lecturers informed them of the issue for psychological support or guidance. The current

researcher was unable to clarify this during the research fieldwork. Future research is recommended to establish this.

Student victims of sexual harassment and sextortion often fail to report the perpetrators due to the fear that the perpetrator would punish them in some way. Africa Polling Institute (2019) suggests that the authorities of some institutions fail to admit allegations of sexual harassment and abuse “in the spirit of collegial camaraderie”. Further, some of the victims of these offences “who reported such cases are further victimized by the same academics, their colleagues, and often the institutions” (Africa Polling Institute, 2019). Students are aware of these problems, which deter them from reporting. It is, however, important to acknowledge that some HEIs have policies against sexual harassment, although most of them do not have such policies, which makes it difficult to prosecute offenders due to a lack of “defined structure” (Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017, p.141).

Another distressed student, for some reason, decided that her pastor could help her out and eventually invited him to her lecturer’s office while also informing her mother about the development:

He said it’s either I gave him something here in the office or he will fail me. ... The man said I should give it [sex] to him here in the office. That got me worried. He said “okay if you’re not capable, you can go”. I had to call my pastor, told my mum. That [the demand for sex] was too much. That was even when I was having issues with my supervisor (Vicky).

Although Vicky’s lecturer told her she could go if she was unwilling to have sex with him, she invited her pastor regardless. This seems to suggest that she believed that the lecturer would punish her in some way, such as failing her assessment for refusing the sexual demand. That could explain why she was relentless. The sexually extorting lecturers do not always put pressure on the students to accept their sexual demands, but the students might suspect that once the sexual demand has already been made, failing to accept it would come with consequences, such as deliberately failing the student. This seemed to be the reason they made efforts to get loved ones involved if they were unable to accept the sexual advances or requests.

In Ijirona 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, 15 percent of the victims reported to their friends, 9 percent reported to parents, and 5 percent reported to their guardians. In Ogbonnaya et al.’s (2011) study in the southeastern part of Nigeria, the vast majority (65.8%) of their 295 participants (female students) reported their experiences to their friends, while 23.1 percent reported to their parents or religious leaders.

The current qualitative study supports the above quantitative studies. Being a qualitative study, it is not concerned with the percentage of those who reported to who but “why” the participants got their loved ones involved into this matter, such as distracting the lecturer or making him uncomfortable to make sexual moves in the presence of the student’s friend, letting a mother or priest talk to the lecturer to change his mind and more. Some qualitative studies on the idea of getting loved ones involved in sextortion in an educational setting could be found. For example, Gyawali & Karki’s (2023) study of the impact of sexual harassment on learning in female students in Nepal found that some participants who were indecently touched by their teachers in private tutorial sessions “decided to bring along other friends as a precautionary measure” and this effectively deterred the perpetrators. This current study shows that Nigerian victims of sextortion adopted a similar tactic and more.

### *6.5 Sorting with cash*

Female students whose lecturers have made their intention (i.e., sexual demands) known to them might escape this by offering cash to the lecturer as an alternative. As previously stated, lecturers often demand cash from male students while demanding sex from female students. However, some lecturers might collect cash when a female student approaches them with such and would not bother about sexual activities with the female student anymore. That said, there is no guarantee that the lecturer must accept cash as an alternative. As Abeni stated under theme 6.2, “I had this friend of mine, she gave money but that’s not enough”. Nevertheless, several participants in this current study stated that sorting with cash worked in some cases.

That’s what [sex] they demand during project topic. Like me, the man that supervised me, the lecturer that supervised me, he asked me [demanding sex] several times but I gave him money. I know he want that [sex] but I felt like if I gave him this kind money, he will leave me (Amanda).

It’s all about money. It’s when you now bring the envelope (i.e., cash), then he can now start reading your work. But they give you option. It’s either you pay the money or you meet him in a hotel [for sex] (Eniola).

Money helps in this thing. The only reason I escaped that wicked man was because I have the money. It was getting to a level that I felt like, no, I can't do this thing (i.e., couldn't have sex). I made up my mind to look for money. I borrowed some cash from friends and gave him. Then he gave me my score (Nzube).

It's embarrassing but if you have money, then you're fine. If you don't have that money they ask you to pay for a hotel or come to their office and you feel embarrassed. ... The money saved me from doing bad thing with the lecturer (Mmeso).

It depends on the lecturer. If it's a lecturer you can just go to his office and say, "please sir this is my situation and I'm willing to make it up with money". So if it's a lecturer that believes that all is money, they'll be like "okay, bring the money and let's sort it out" (Nora).

All the participants above used money as an alternative to dodge sex, indicating that this is an effective way to distract the lecturers. Nora's comments, however, indicated that offering cash is not a guarantee to dodge sex; rather, it would work only with a lecturer who values money more than sex. Rhoda's experience below indicates that certain lecturers did not consider cash as an alternative as long as the student in question was a female:

I asked the man to calculate how much I should pay him to allow me pass this course cos I was tired. I asked him to just name the amount cos money is not problem for me. Do you know what the man told me? He said he only collects cash from guys, that is, those who didn't pass but for ladies, it's only one thing. That is for them to meet him in a hotel (Rhoda).

Rhoda's lecturer seemed to value sex more than cash, hence, he did not bother to accept the cash from the student even as the student had indicated that she was rich and could afford any amount he could request. This connects this to the notion of "obsession" previously mentioned, which Agazue (2023a) also discovered to be an important factor. This refers to a situation where a lecturer insists on having sex with a student even after collecting cash from such student. However, Tochi observed that both monetary bribe and cash bribe might not save the student from certain lecturers:

For some people, if you can do it, do it, if you cannot do it, you just have three options. If you can pay [cash], pay. If you can pay in kind [sex], if you can fail, fail. That's just it. Do you understand? Unless you have a personal relationship with them. Maybe you're a course rep, then maybe all these three options, you can just escape them. You cannot pay in cash or kind and also not fail. That's just it. If not that, you can't escape these three options (Tochi).

This reflects the words of Professor Ngozi Illoh that "many male lecturers simply want to 'conquer' and 'boast' about how many girls they have succeeded in 'tasting'" (Fatunde, 2018), although it was unclear whether this was the lecturers' motive. It could also be a case of a lack of self-control or obsession.

Favour's words below are consistent with the belief that some lecturers are not interested in cash once they are determined to have carnal knowledge of the student:

So some lecturers, once they are determined to get something, they can go to any extent to get what they want. The other girl was that the lecturer told her that she would get her by all means. Then the girl told him that she's going to pay him some amount of money and he refused (Favour).

A friend of mine even gave serious cash but the lecturer still pestering her for sex. The man still asked for sex because he decided he want to sleep with her and not just her money. Just like myself, I gave him money and he told me money is not all. Can you imagine that? (Anike).

Similar cases have also appeared in the media. For example, a nursing student of the Ogun State College of Health Technology impregnated by her lecturer described her plight in the hands of two lecturers who determined she must not pass her assessments without offering sex to them. The first lecturer presented cash as an alternative to her:

The lecturer he [first lecturer] 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 [second lecturer] 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).

This student did not accept the "offers" made by the first lecturer and eventually failed because of that. The second lecturer, however, gave her only one option, i.e., to provide sex. She provided sex to save herself from

failing her assessment, but unfortunately, this led to pregnancy. Several factors come into play here: First, if the cash is substantial, the lecturer might think that it was worth more than sex. Second, if the lecturer is not too obsessed with having sex with the student, he might also see the cash as beneficial. A cash alternative might not work when the lecturer considered it too small or when the lecturer seemed too obsessed with having sex with the student. Agazue (2023a) has identified obsession as an important factor driving lecturers to fail their students or punish them in some ways for not accepting their sexual demands.

While responding to legal cases on campus sextortion in 2019, Professor Ngozi Obiajulum Ilo of the University of Benin described how male lecturers force female students into prostitution and the mental torture these students go through in Nigerian HEIs as a result of sextortion. On the issue of sex versus cash, she described her observation:

Some male lecturers collect money for marks as well as sex. Only a few escapees are rescued from the jaws of these voracious lecturers” (Fatunde, 2019).

This is in line with the experiences of the current participants. The experiences of the victims under this theme were in line with what Sundström & Wängnerud (2021, p.3) observed concerning female immigrants paying “double cost” (cash and sex) to border officials to be able to cross borders, while the border guards collected only cash from male travellers. The current findings show that this dirty deal is not limited to such environments but also practised in HEI environments. However, existing studies on how students use cash as an alternative for sex to evade sextortion hardly exist, making this current study novel. While sextortion is not new in HEIs around the world, how student victims attempt to escape this has not generated academic research. Thus, this current study has bridged an important gap in the literature.

Patriarchal operations contribute to sextortion or sexual corruption because, as Coleman et al. (2024, p.e1211) observed, this act “cannot be understood outside the institutional and societal structures that reinforce inequalities and powerlessness among certain groups, which make them vulnerable to such acts”. In many societies, the patriarchal structures mean that many women have no decent means of livelihood and may be unable to afford certain services – a situation likely to encourage sexual exploitation by those providing such services. Having reviewed the literature on sexual corruption in different countries, Coleman et al. (2024) found that in some places, women pay for services with sex more often because they have no money to pay for such services due to women being less employed than men. This particular observation also relates to the current finding where students were able to escape sex with lecturers by offering the latter a substantial amount of money, such as the cases with Amanda, Nzube, and Mmeso, who described how cash enabled them to escape the sextortion.

Although Coleman et al.’s (2024) report points out that the women paid with sex for being less employed than men, the notion of unemployment did not seem appropriate in the current study since the victims were students who were not expected to be earning money. Sextortion is often discussed within the notion of gender-based violence (see Coleman et al., 2024) because more women are victims than men. It is understood that there are more men in authority than women, although this cannot be said about all types of jobs or in all societies. It seems that even when women are authority figures in societies or environments where sextortion is common, they hardly demand sex from men as a transaction. Felson et al. (2025, p.3) observed that “opportunity for sexual bribery is greatest when the authority is a man and the subordinate is a woman.” The views of the current participants reflect this. For example, a participant (Jessica) described to the interviewer (i.e., the current researcher) how normalised sextortion was in her department:

In my department, it’s very common. In the school of business like all these accounting, mass communication, commerce, it’s really high there (Jessica).

The interviewer probed the participants further with the following question: “Why is it common in those departments?” She explained:

Because they have so many women. They have so many women in these departments (Jessica).

This supports the idea that sexual harassment is a gendered offence (see Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Hennekam & Bennett, 2017). As a gendered offence targeted at women, the more women in a particular setting, the more likely that incidents would occur. As sexual harassment is “a symptom of social inequalities” (Burn, 2019), the students were at risk not only for being females but also for being in lower



position as students while males (lecturers) held higher positions. Some scholars (see Muoghalu & Olaoye, 2017; Okafor et al., 2022) have chosen to discuss the menace of sexual harassment in 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 a facilitating factor. Lecturers have developed a habit that they could easily justify by thinking that these are females who could be used for fun or comfort (Agazue, 2023a). Following their study of sexual harassment among university staff in Glasgow, Scotland, McCarry & Jones (2022, p.924) observed that the "invidious circle of gender inequality and sexual harassment is mutually supportive and sustaining". This particular finding indicates that sexual harassment in general is connected to gender inequality.

#### *6.6 Arranging sting operations and electronic recording*

Sting operations have become one of the methods used by victims of campus sextortion to escape the perpetrators. The BBC (2019) Africa Eye conducted what should be regarded as the most sophisticated and highly publicised sting operation on campus sextortion in West Africa. Dr Boniface Igbeneghu of the University of Lagos (previously discussed in this report) was their target in Nigeria. However, even before this, some students had done this to produce evidence against their perpetrators (lecturers). These sting operations have been conducted not only by students but also by the authorities of some HEIs who were determined to produce evidence to be able to punish suspected offenders. Sting operations almost always involve some form of electronic recording to serve as proof. However, some students have chosen to audio- or video-record the words or actions of their lecturers without necessarily engaging in sting operations.

A victim, Ozy described below how a lecturer who sexually extorted her and her course mates had a sting operation set up against him as he was set to repeat the act on another set of students the following year, and how this ended the then ongoing sextortion:

Next year, he repeated what he did to us to those students during the next session. ... Then one of dean's daughter was involved. Then she and her friends had to lure him to a location. She agreed that she was going to pay in kind and he send location and all that. So with all the chats, all the calls, the girl handed to the dad and all that. That was how the man was suspended indefinitely (Ozy).

Other victims described their experiences and those of their peers or coursemates below:

When this man frustrated me enough, my fiancé was like "can we just book a hotel as he requested and then we can put cameras and all that?" I accepted that idea. Then in that hotel, he undressed and was quite comfortable. I didn't undress and I allowed him to be touching me and all that. Then he was waiting for me to undress and I refused. Then he got mad at me and started making threats that he must not allow me to pass his course blab la bla. All was caught on camera and we tried to use it against him. Then he became the one begging us (Chimdi).

There was a time I heard that one girl, she had this relationship with the lecturer. So I don't know how the relationship went but they sent the girl to come and set the man up. ... They set the man up. The girl put him in a trap. So with that they held an evidence against him (Ginika).

Then there was a student that had to arrange with the boyfriend. ... they [lecturers] had to invite them [female students] into a hotel. ... What they did was to connive with the boyfriend and meet the man in the hotel. So when the man [lecturer] came and started making advances, they started recording. They came in and told him they've recorded everything and they're taking the record to Senate. The man started begging (Grace).

The term "set up" in the participants' words could be misunderstood; thus, it is worth clarifying that the students involved in the cases discussed in this current report were innocent students whose lecturers threatened to fail them unless they offered the latter sex as demanded. Since cases could be easily rejected by some HEI authorities for lack of evidence, some students have taken it upon themselves to produce credible evidence through sting operations or electronic recording of conversations.

Sting operations in different HEIs have also appeared in many media reports on campus sextortion. University World News (Deji-Folulile, 2024), for instance, presented a video that went viral on social media in mid-2024 involving a female student and her lecturer where the student was being indecently touched by the lecturer showing the student feeling uncomfortable as "the man persists in drawing her towards him, touching her

indecently and speaking inaudibly into her ears” (Deji-Folutile, 2024). The video was said to be “taken covertly from outside the window of the presumed lecturer’s office” but it was unclear whether this was a form of sting operation or not.

However, University World News presented another incident that was clearly a sting operation conducted by students following a previous case involving non-consensual sex between a certain lecturer and their peer.

They set a trap for him, to the best of my knowledge. He was a former dean, but he has since been demoted (Deji-Folutile, 2024).

The “trap” involved covert video recording of the act, which was later handed to the relevant authority – an act that yielded the required result to the students, i.e., justice in the form of an action against the offending lecturer.

The Sun News (see Dike et al., 2018) presented the case of a student at the Department of Languages and Linguistics, Osun State University, Osogbo, who used her laptop to record her lecturer attempting to have sex with her in a hotel room and posted the video footage to social media. The footage was later reviewed by the university’s governing council, who terminated the lecturer’s contract thereafter (Dike et al., 2018).

Premium Times described a similar case where a female student of Obafemi Awolowo University recorded her lecturer on the advice of her friends, who were said to have been the victims of the same lecturer previously. The lecturer had earlier threatened the student that “she would fail again and again if she refuses to sleep with him” (Alabi, 2020). This threat led to the student seeking advice from her friends, who advised her to visit the lecturer and record the session, which she did. A university source described the outcome of the student’s action as follows:

So, she was in Olaleye’s [lecturer] office and just as predicted, Olaleye held her by the hand and began to fondle her. While he was carried away, the lady turned on the voice recording application on her phone and taped all his vulgar words including the threat (Alabi, 2020).

The case of a female student, Monica Osagie is arguably the most popular case of campus sextortion recorded on a mobile phone, which eventually became highly publicised by the media. After her lecturer, Professor Richard Akindele of Obafemi Awolowo University, insisted that he must have sex with her before she could pass her assessment, Osagie recorded her conversation where the lecturer was demanding “five rounds of sex” and made the recording public. The court used this audio recording to convict Professor Akindele and sentenced him to jail (Adebayo & Busari, 2018).

Sting operations appear to be a working solution to sextortion. As previously demonstrated in the literature review section of this journal article, some universities have used sting operations to produce evidence against lecturers known to sexually attack their students in the former’s offices (see Ibrahim, 2019). This current theme has shown how students also use sting operations successfully, leading to actions being taken against lecturers who might have evaded justice due to a lack of evidence. Evidence has become vital lately because the perpetrators were used to punishing their victims more severely when the latter reported without evidence. Cases abound where accused lecturers denied the allegations. There was a case at Ahmadu Bello University where a sacked professor challenged his case in court, claiming that he invited the female student to a hotel room not for sex but to “receive chapter three of the thesis she was writing” (Ibrahim, 2019). The court then ordered the university to reinstate the lecturer.

Further, the notion of “collegial camaraderie” in these incidents (see Africa Polling Institute, 2019) also meant that even if allegations were substantiated, the colleagues of the perpetrator could protect him, prompting their victims to seek more credible evidence that not only the authorities of the institution would see but outsiders too, which could put more pressure on the authorities of the institution involved. No evidence to deal with the suspect means that the suspect is very likely to remain in the job, and if this involved a student he had threatened with fail, for instance, he would remain in the position to carry out this threat. On the contrary, once evidence appears, the suspect may be removed if found guilty. Even if he is not removed, he would no longer have the audacity to do as he wishes with the case already known to authorities.

Sting operations are a proven crime prevention and detection method used widely around the world by both private citizens and law enforcement officers to catch suspects and pursue justice. Law enforcement officers have used sting operations to catch and arrest those engaging in different types of crimes, including financial fraud, international smuggling, counterterrorism, organised crime, and more. In 1995, Charles Nunez, a bomb maker in Massachusetts, United States was successfully arrested with evidence by police officers who posed as his customers (Hay, 2005). In 2005, American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents disguised as limo

drivers arrested 87 suspects from different countries connected to international smuggling who entered the United States as wedding guests (FBI, n.d.). Similarly, the FBI used sting operations to arrest those manipulating “penny stocks” in their investigation of financial frauds (Joh & Joo, 2014).

Individuals and groups have also followed the footsteps of law enforcement officials in conducting sting operations. In the UK, for instance, “Paedophile Hunters” is well-known. This involves private citizens who snare paedophiles by posing as children. Sting operations usually produce concrete evidence in the form of video- or audio recordings, and chats where available, making it difficult that the suspect would deny the allegations. Nigeria is a large-power distance country. In Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory, large-power distance suggests that “a society’s level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders” (Hofstede, 2011, p.9). Hierarchy in large-power societies, according to Hofstede (Hofstede, 2011, p.9), “means existential inequality”. Lecturers are among the middleclass professionals who wield power in Nigerian society, and this makes it difficult for their victims to report them or obtain justice, as accusations can be easily ignored or downplayed. With sting operations, however, the reverse has often been the case. It was interesting to see how the current participants successfully used sting operations to evade sextortion and got justice for their victimisation. The use of sting operations in HEIs to snare perpetrators of sextortion is something that hardly exists in academic literature.

## 7. Conclusion

This journal article explored how Nigerian female students evade sextortion by their male lecturers. With semi-structured interviews of 45 female graduates and undergraduates and also personal accounts of victims that have appeared in the media recently, rich data were obtained. The participants described different ways they dodged sextortion depending on their individual circumstances, skills, or resources they possessed. This is reflected in the six themes produced in the analysis section of this research paper. In the first theme, *Avoiding personal contacts*, the participants did their best to ensure that they did not spend time with the lecturers on a face-to-face basis and avoided situations that could make the lecturers pick on them for a personal conversation. They avoided visiting lecturers in their offices when practicable, changed pathways on sighting the lecturers, and pretended as if they did not see the lecturer when they came close to each other. This mostly worked for the participants.

The second theme, *Pretending to be married*, is about how the participants faked marital status even though they were single – just to dodge sextortion. A participant used a superstitious tale to evade sextortion, which the lecturer believed probably due to the endemic superstitious beliefs in Nigeria. Some students put on a wedding ring to showcase themselves to their lecturers as married women since they believed that married women were not sexually harassed as much as single women. This worked for them, but they also noted that it did not always work as some lecturers had the habit of demanding sex from anyone they found sexually appealing, irrespective of their marital status. Some participants attended lectures with little children to showcase themselves as married with children, while another student visited her lecturer with a male friend in ways that suggested that the young man was her husband. These tactics generally worked for the students.

As the participants had noticed that failing an assessment was one of the factors facilitating sextortion, they chose to study hard ahead of their assessment days. The third theme, *Studying hard ahead of exams* reflects this. Passing an assessment meant that they did not have to meet a lecturer to discuss their failure and what to do to pass the reassessment. In a way, passing their assessment saved them from “personal contacts” with their lecturers, which was an important factor in sextortion.

The fourth theme, *Getting loved ones involved* showed the efforts the participants made to escape sextortion after noticing sexual advances or explicit demands for sexual activities. Different victims applied different measures depending on what was convenient for them. Some of them took their parents or priests/pastors to their lecturer’s offices to put pressure on him to stop the sexual demands. Some informed their parents and friends for guidance on the best course of action to take, while others took their friends to their lecturer’s invitation as a deterrent should the lecturer try to engage them sexually in a private place. These measures generally worked.

The fifth theme, *Sorting with cash*, shows how those targeted for sextortion tried to use cash as an alternative resource to dodge the act. While a monetary bribe is an offence just like sexual bribe, the victims considered the former safer. It was a case of deciding between two wrongs and the victims considered cash to be a better wrong. The victims tried to offer cash and those who did not have cash borrowed from their loved ones to ensure that they were not violated. This worked for some of them but others described it as ineffective when the lecturer

seemed obsessed with sex. This means that cash alternative could not guarantee that the targeted victim would escape sextortion. Cash alternative worked with lecturers who were flexible with their demands, valued cash more than sex, and were not sexually obsessed with the student.

The final theme in the research report, *Arranging sting operations and electronic recording*, is where the participants' efforts to expose the lecturers and get justice for themselves were discussed. Sextortion victims whose lecturers insisted that they must engage in sexual activities with them before they could pass their assessments pretended that they were playing along with the lecturers, such as turning up in a hotel or lecturer's office as arranged, but with a mobile device to record the lecturer's words and/or deeds. In some cases, the victim invited friends or other persons to do the recording and/or distract the lecturer when he relaxed to engage in the sexual act. This generally worked for the victims. Since these offences were committed by powerful individuals in a large-power society where justice for the poor is often difficult, the pressure that usually followed when the recordings were made public seemed to have contributed to the victim achieving justice.

This current journal article has demonstrated not only what appears to be a normalisation of sextortion in Nigerian HEIs but also the enormous stress it puts on the targeted students, forcing them to take extraordinary measures to dodge the act. This reflects the high level of corruption in Nigerian society, which innocent students pay a huge price for. The psychological and academic impacts of sextortion on these innocent victims call for effective measures to curb the menace. Sextortion and sexual harassment persist in Nigerian HEIs due to inadequate or a lack of policies against these offences. Although some HEIs have 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. 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 recommended that HEIs 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 these offences. The authorities of the institutions should also ensure that the persons are not corrupt in other ways, such as being willing to accept bribes from suspects or protecting the suspect in the spirit of collegial camaraderie. All necessary 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. In what ways did you try to dodge sexual extortion or sexual advances from your lecturer?
2. Can you describe any particular tactics you employed to dodge this act?
3. What led to you choosing such method to enable you evade sextortion?
4. How effective or ineffective do you consider this method?