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Assessment of Knowledge, Attitude and Experience of Sexual Violence among Female Employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Northwest Nigeria

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Oche Mansur Oche*, Habibullah Adamu, Shawwal A Mallam, Rasheedat A Oluwashola and Aisha S Muhammad

Department of Community Health, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto Nigeria

*For Correspondence: Email: ochedr@hotmail.com; Phone: +2348035045144

Abstract

This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out to determine the knowledge, attitude and experiences of sexual violence among female employees in Sokoto metropolis. Multistage sampling technique was used to select 191 participants and a set of pre-tested structured questionnaire was used to obtain data from the participants. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS version 20. The mean age of the respondents was 28.9 years \pm 6 with 102 (53%) of them aged between 20-30 years. Up to 112 (63.6%) of them were unmarried, 127 (73%) were Muslims and 96 (54.5%) in the upper socio-economic class (SEC). About 50% of respondents in both formal and informal settings had good knowledge of sexual violence and up to 36% and 64% of respondents in the formal and informal settings respectively have positive attitude towards sexual violence (SV). Overall prevalence of SV in the workplace was 63.8% (N=113) and significant predictors of SV in the work place include tribe ($p=0.006$), work setting ($p=0.02$) and society's perception of SV ($P<0.001$). Respondents in this study showed high levels of awareness and knowledge regarding SV in the workplace. The study revealed a high prevalence of SV in the workplace especially among females in formal settings with several factors including, perception of the society on sexual violence and working in the formal sector were found to have influenced respondents' experience of SV in the workplace. There is the need, therefore for the government and relevant stakeholders to put in place measures to curb SV in the workplace and protect victims of such practices with relevant legislations. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2020; 24[2]: 164-175*).

Keywords: Sexual violence, female employees, knowledge, Sokoto metropolis

Résumé

Cette étude transversale descriptive a été réalisée pour déterminer les connaissances, l'attitude et les expériences de la violence sexuelle parmi les employées de la métropole de Sokoto. Une technique d'échantillonnage à plusieurs degrés a été utilisée pour sélectionner 191 participants et un ensemble de questionnaires structurés pré-testés a été utilisé pour obtenir des données des participants. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'IBM SPSS version 20. L'âge moyen des répondants était de 28,9 ans \pm 6, dont 102 (53%) âgés de 20 à 30 ans. Jusqu'à 112 (63,6%) d'entre eux étaient célibataires, 127 (73%) étaient musulmans et 96 (54,5%) dans la classe socio-économique supérieure (SEC). Environ 50% des répondants dans les contextes formels et informels avaient une bonne connaissance de la violence sexuelle et jusqu'à 36% et 64% des répondants dans les contextes formel et informel respectivement ont une attitude positive envers la violence sexuelle (VS). La prévalence globale de la VS sur le lieu de travail était de 63,8% (N = 113) et les prédictifs significatifs de la VS sur le lieu de travail comprennent la tribu ($p = 0,006$), le milieu de travail ($p = 0,02$) et la perception de la société de la VS ($P < 0,001$). La prévalence de la VS s'est avérée élevée dans cette étude. Il est donc nécessaire que le gouvernement et les parties prenantes concernées mettent en place des mesures pour limiter les VS sur le lieu de travail. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2020; 24[2]: 164-175*).

Mots-clés: Violence sexuelle, employées, savoir, métropole de Sokoto

Introduction

Sexual violence (SV) is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual

comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including

but not limited to home and work¹. The word sexual violence can be used interchangeably with sexual harassment. Its behavior forms include visual (leering), verbal, (sexual teasing) jokes, comments or questions; unwanted pressures for sexual favor or date, unwanted touching or pinching, unwanted pressures for sexual favor with implied threats or job related consequences for non-cooperation, physical assault, sexual assault, rape². The Center for Disease Control (CDC)³ classified SV as completed non-consensual sex act (e.g. rape); attempted non-consensual act (e.g. attempted rape); abusive sexual contact (e.g. unwanted touching) and non-contact sexual abuse (e.g. sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention). According to Britz, several forms of sexual harassment occur including: Verbal (Sexual innuendoes, jokes of a sexual nature, sexual propositions or sexual threats), Non-Verbal (Sexual suggestive objects or pictures, suggestive or insulting sounds, leering, whistling or obscene gestures) and Physical (Unwanted physical contact, including touching, pinching, brushing the body, coerced sexual intercourse or assault)⁴.

Sexual violence remains highly stigmatized in all settings, thus levels of disclosure of the assault vary between regions. In general, it is a widely underreported phenomenon, thus available data tend to underestimate the true scale of the problem. In addition, sexual violence is also a neglected area of research, thus deeper understanding of the issue is imperative in order to promote a coordinated movement against it⁵. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), factors increasing a woman's vulnerability to sexual violence include being young, consuming alcohol or drugs, having previously been raped or sexually abused, having many sexual partners, involvement in sex work, becoming more educated and economically empowered⁶.

Awareness and perception of women regarding sexual violence varies across regions and across different work settings; higher level of awareness of sexual violence have been reported in developed than developing countries⁷. While it is generally acknowledged that sexual violence is pervasive in all countries and at all levels of

society, reliable statistics concerning prevalence among people of different socioeconomic status in Nigeria are very limited⁸. In the United States (US), a prevalence rate of 42% was reported in a study⁹, in northern India, 18–40% of men admitted having nonconsensual sex with their wives, and 4–9% had physically forced their wives to have sex¹⁰. In a local study in Melbourne, Australia, 13% of women interviewed had experienced rape or attempted rape¹¹. In Spain, 4.3% of women seen in a general population were reported to have experienced sexual violence¹². Studies on sexual violence found a life time prevalence of physical and or sexual violence of 61% in Tanzania¹³, 18.7 % of women aged 15-49 years experienced either sexual or physical violence in Nigeria¹⁴, whereas 1 in every 4 women had been raped in South Africa¹⁵, and 7.3% had experienced forced first intercourse in Eastern Cape¹⁶. Research on psychological violence in Kenya and South Africa showed that it was more prevalent than assumed¹⁷.

Not everyone who experienced sexual violence is affected in the same way; however, sexual violence can have profound effects on a person's employment regardless of when or where the incidence occurred. Sexual violence does not have to occur at the workplace or be perpetrated by a co-worker to impact the survivor's employment. When it occurs in the workplace, employees can feel threatened, harassed, and unsafe. Absenteeism, interrupted job performance, and loss of experienced employees are only some of the costs that employers bear as a direct result of sexual violence in the workplace¹⁸.

Numerous studies have shown that sexual violence can cause physical and psychological damage, disrupt social dynamics, negatively impact women's support systems and affect their attitudes towards their jobs¹⁹. In addition, women who choose to report often face retaliation from the employer and negative responses from her family and community. However, delays in reporting can have significant implications for a woman's ability to access timely medical, legal, and mental health assistance²⁰.

Sexual violence is a neglected area of research in Nigeria probably because of the sensitivity of the subject. There are currently no national data on the nature and extent of the problem in the country.

The available data on sexual violence are derived from small-scale reproductive health surveys and police records. This study, therefore, aims to determine the knowledge, attitude and experiences of sexual violence among female employees in Sokoto metropolis.

Methods

Study area

The study was conducted in Sokoto metropolis which is the capital city of Sokoto state in the North Western part of Nigeria. Sokoto state has 23 local government areas and has a projected population of 5,2279,604 persons as at 2018 (based on current population growth of 2.61%). Hausa and Fulani constitute the predominant ethnic groups; however, there are also the Zabarma and the Tuareg minority in the border local government areas. Islam is the predominant religion while Christianity is practiced by some of the other ethnic groups, mainly non-indigenes. Farmers form the largest proportion of the population, while the rest are mostly civil servants, traders and artisans. Other commercial activities are cement and leather production. The State also has a number of tertiary educational institutions including federal and state universities, College of Education, Polytechnic and several secondary and primary schools²¹. The state civil service and private sector employs a large proportion of people resident in the state capital.

Study design

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study carried out among female employees in both formal and informal settings within Sokoto metropolis of Sokoto state who have worked for not less than six months prior to the commencement of this study (Inclusion criteria). The study was carried out between April 10th and May 20th, 2019.

Sample size estimation and sampling technique

Sample size was calculated using the formula for estimating sample size in a population less than 10,000²².

After adjusting for a non-response rate of 10%, a total of one hundred and ninety-one (191) respondents were recruited into the study.

A two staged sampling technique was used to select the respondents as follows: institutions where there was high number of female workers were identified as clusters including education, health, hospitality industry, civil service and the private sector representing the informal sector.

Selection of one cluster each from a sector after line listing and from each cluster selected, a list of all female employees was obtained. Thereafter, participants were selected by using systematic sampling technique after calculating sampling interval using proportion to size.

Study tool and data analysis

A set of semi-structured self-administered questionnaire was administered on the respondents which sought information on socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge regarding sexual violence, attitude towards sexual violence in the workplace and their experiences regarding sexual violence in the work place in Sokoto metropolis. A total of 178 questionnaires were found suitable for analysis, giving a response rate of 93%.

The questionnaire was entered into and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 20. Data cleaning was done, and running of frequencies. Each correct response to a knowledge question was awarded a score of one mark and zero mark was awarded to each incorrect response. For the attitude variables, each positive response was awarded a score of one mark whereas zero mark was awarded to each negative response. The knowledge scores were added up, converted to percentages and graded as either good knowledge (score of $\geq 50\%$) or poor knowledge ($< 50\%$). Attitude scores were graded as positive ($\geq 50\%$) or negative attitude ($< 50\%$). Continuous variables were summarized as mean and standard deviation; categorical variables were summarized and presented as frequencies and percentage. This was followed by inferential statistics (multivariate, logistic regression) which were used to identify the major determinants of sexual violence in the workplace at alpha level of 0.05.

Results

The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 46 years with mean age of 28 years ± 5.7 . One hundred and twelve (63.6%) of the respondents were unmarried and majority of them were Muslims (Table 1).

Majority of the respondents were aware of the term sexual violence and a greater proportion of them 65(41.4%) had as their source of information, radio/television. Most of them responded correctly to questions on sexual violence, however, up to 68(38.2%) of them wrongly responded to question on accidental body contact as a form of sexual violence (Table 2).

Majority, 171(96%) of the respondents had good knowledge of sexual violence (Figure 1). More than two thirds of the respondents regarded sexual violence as offensive and up to 138 (77.6%) of them believed women who were sexually assaulted by men was because of the way they talked or dressed. For 157 (88.2%) of the respondents, they believed perpetrators of sexual violence should be punished (Table 3).

Up to 167 (94%) of the respondents had positive attitude towards sexual violence (Figure 2). Prevalence of sexual violence in the workplace was higher [109 (61.1%)] among female employees in the formal work setting as against those in the informal work setting (Figure 3).

Regarding the various forms of sexual violence experienced by respondents, sexual coercion was the most prevalent form experienced [108 (60.7%)], followed by sexual advancement and sexual enticement (59.6% and 57.3% respectively); rape was the least prevalent form of sexual violence, however, it was as high as 43.8% (Figure 4).

More than half [97 (54.5%)] of the respondents had experienced sexual violence at their work places within the past one year and up to 38 (38.8%) of them said it was from their bosses. About two-third (64%) of the respondents said the sexual violence they experienced affected their work; 55 (56.7%) of them said they had to resign from the job, 41 (31.1%) did nothing, however, some [50 (51.1%)] reported to the authority. For those respondents that did not report to the police, 37 (78.1%) said they felt there was

no need, 21 (24.1%) said it was due to fear, shame and stigma (Table 4).

Up to 80 (70%) of the respondents who were of the Hausa tribe had experienced sexual violence whereas among respondents who were of the Igbo extraction, 17 (60.7%) of them did not experience sexual violence; this association was statistically significant ($p=0.002$). Similarly, majority [91 (72.8%)] of the Muslim respondents had also experienced sexual violence as against the Christian respondents whom less than half [21 (42%)] experienced sexual violence; this association was also statistically significant. Other factors significantly associated with sexual violence in the workplace include respondents' work setting ($p<0.001$) and society's perception of sexual violence ($p<0.001$).

On forward logistic regression on factors associated with sexual violence in the work place, perception of the society on sexual violence was the strongest predictor of sexual violence in the workplace ($p<0.001$), followed by tribe and formal work setting ($p=0.02$). Those who believed the society sees sexual violence as a normal act were about 16 times less likely to experience sexual violence in the workplace (OR=0.062, $p<0.001$, 95% CI= 0.02-0.193); those in formal work setting are about three times less likely to experience sexual violence. Respondents who were of the Hausa tribe were 23 times more likely to experience sexual violence in the workplace (OR=23.36, $p=0.006$, 95% CI=2.4-221.361).

Discussion

The mean age (28 years ± 5.7) of the respondents observed in this study is similar to that reported in a study on workplace violence and sexual harassment in Ethiopia¹⁸. The similarity observed in both studies could be attributed to the fact that majority of the study subjects were below 30 years of age. Majority of the respondents in this study are Hausas and Muslims which is not unexpected considering that the study area is in north-western part of Nigeria where majority of the population are Hausa Muslims; however this is in contrast to the findings of a study conducted in southern part of Nigeria where the majority of the respondents were Yorubas and Christians²⁵.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria

Variables	Frequency (%) N=176
Age(years)	
<20	7(4.0)
20-29	102(58.0)
30-39	54(30.7)
40-49	13(7.4)
Marital status	
Married	64(36.4)
Unmarried	112(63.6)
Tribe	
Hausa	72(62.6)
Yoruba	5(22.5)
Igbo	8(28.6)
Others	3(25.0)
Religion	
Islam	127(73)
Christianity	47(27)
Work setting	
Formal	88(49.7)
Informal	89(50.3)

Table 2: Knowledge of female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria on sexual violence

Variable	Frequency (%)
Ever heard of the term sexual violence (SV)?	
Yes	157(88.2)
No	21(11.8)
Source of information	
Radio/television	65(41.4)
Newspaper/magazine	47(29.9)
Colleagues	36(23.2)
Others	9(5.5)
Invasion of privacy is form SV	
Yes	153(86)
No	25(14)
Open expression of sexual offer is form of SV	
Yes	147(82.6)
No	31(17.4)
Accidental body contact is form of SV	
Yes	68(38.2)
No	110(61.8)
Attempted rape is form of SV	
Yes	154(86.5)
No	24(13.5)
Rape is form of SV	
Yes	159(89.3)
No	19(10.7)
Threats and bribery of sexual nature is form of SV	
Yes	153(86)
No	25(14)

The Majority of the respondents were aware of sexual violence in the workplace and a greater proportion of them (41.4%) heard about it from the radio/television. This high level of awareness observed is not surprising because this study also revealed that up to 96% of the respondents had good knowledge of sexual violence in the workplace. Similar observations were made within and outside Nigeria; for example, a study conducted in Osun state Nigeria also revealed a high level of awareness and knowledge of respondents of sexual violence²³. Similarly, a study conducted by Paludi and Barickman⁷ also revealed a high level of awareness of the problem in the developed countries especially the United States and the United Kingdom. It is interesting to note however, that up to 38.2% of the respondents in this study wrongly responded to the question on accidental body contact as a form of sexual violence. This may not be unrelated to the fact that the meaning of sexual violence is socially constructed depending on the personal and situational characteristics of the individual making the judgement²⁴. This therefore, implies that in evaluating what constitute sexual violence, one has to also consider the socio-cultural factors and personality of the individual.

Majority of the respondents had positive attitude towards sexual violence with about 90% of the respondents perceiving sexual violence as offensive and this is slightly higher, compared to a study which was conducted among female employees in Lagos State Nigeria². The reason for the higher figure in our study may not be unrelated to the more conservative views of women in northern part of Nigeria on sex related issues compared to women in southern part of Nigeria. A greater proportion of the respondents, believed that perpetrators of sexual violence should be punished severely. Similar views were also expressed in a study conducted in Egypt, where all participants suggested a more stringent legal punishment for the perpetrators of sexual violence as a way of curbing the increasing menace of this social malady in the community²⁴. All barriers to effective reporting of cases of sexual violence in our societies need to be dismantled if this social malady with its attendant effects must be nipped in the bud.

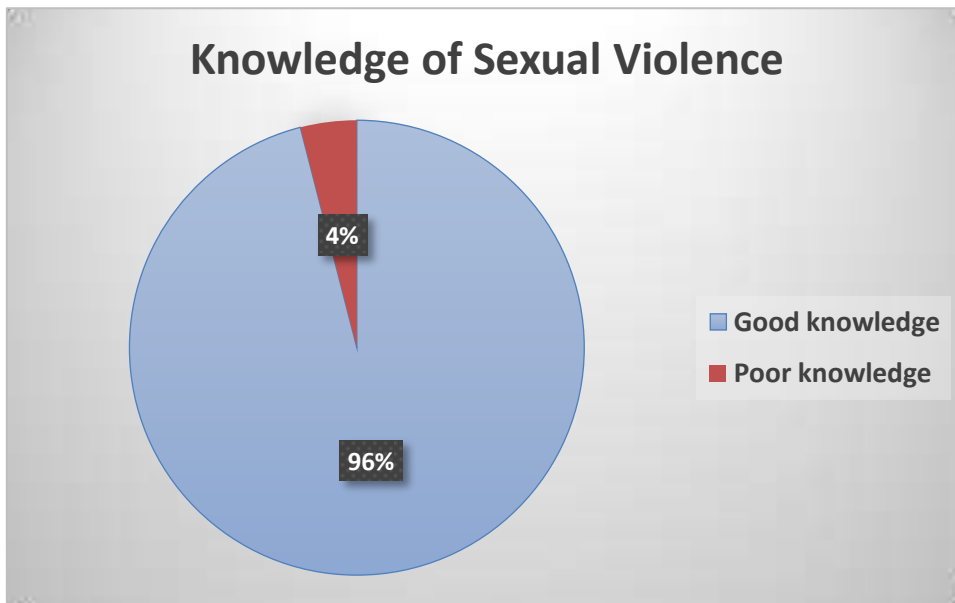


Figure 1: Knowledge of sexual violence of female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria

Table 3: Attitude of female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria towards sexual violence

Variables	Frequency (%) N=178
Sexual violence is offensive	161(90.4)
The society see sexual violence as a normal act	96(53.9)
Most women who are sexually assaulted by a man provoke his behavior by the way they talk, act or dress	138(77.6)
Sexual violence can decrease a woman’s productivity	142(79.8)
Perpetrator of sexual violence should be punished	157(88.2)
Sexual violence is as a result of being single	138(77.5)

The all-time prevalence of sexual violence among female employees in the workplace in this study was found to be 63.5% which is quite higher than the 42% prevalence rate reported in a study in USA among female federal workers⁹, and 53% reported among female workers in the general population in San Francisco²⁵. These differences in the prevalence estimates of sexual violence are probably due to usage of various definitions, the sampled population and the methodology used to measure it. There is no gold standard for measuring sexual violence as some experiences are difficult to categorize²⁶; however, this study

used a broader definition of sexual violence including verbal harassment. In a study conducted in Alexandria, Egypt, a much lower prevalence rate (2.2%) of sexual violence was reported²⁷. This could be explained by the fact that the study was conducted on only female health workers of a University Hospital and so not as diversified as the respondents in our current study. Another possible reason for the very low prevalence in Egypt was because other forms of workplace violence were assessed, and Egypt has very strict observance of Islamic laws which prescribe stiffer penalties for offenders of sexual violence.

More than half (54.5%) of the respondents had experienced sexual violence at their workplaces within the past one year. This finding is contrary to what was observed in a previous study where only 4.1% of the respondents experienced sexual harassment at workplace in the last one year prior to the study¹⁸, this wide contrast could be explained by the fact that the study was based not only on sexual violence but other forms of workplace violence.

Regarding the various forms of sexual violence experienced by respondents in this study, sexual coercion was the most prevalent form experienced while rape was the least prevalent form of sexual violence. Rape or forced sex is mostly perpetrated by individuals known (trusted)

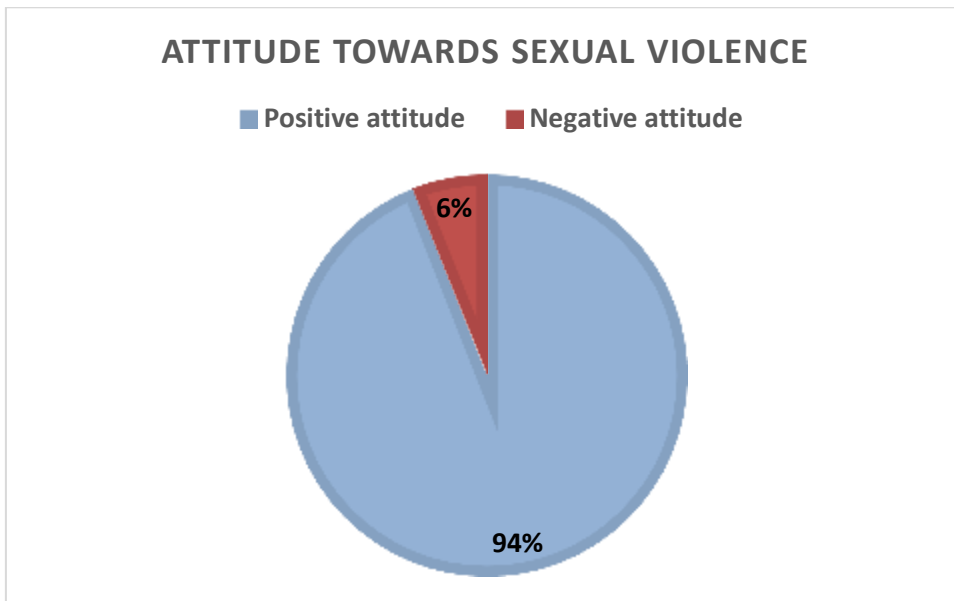


Figure 2: Proportion of female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria with positive and negative attitude towards sexual violence

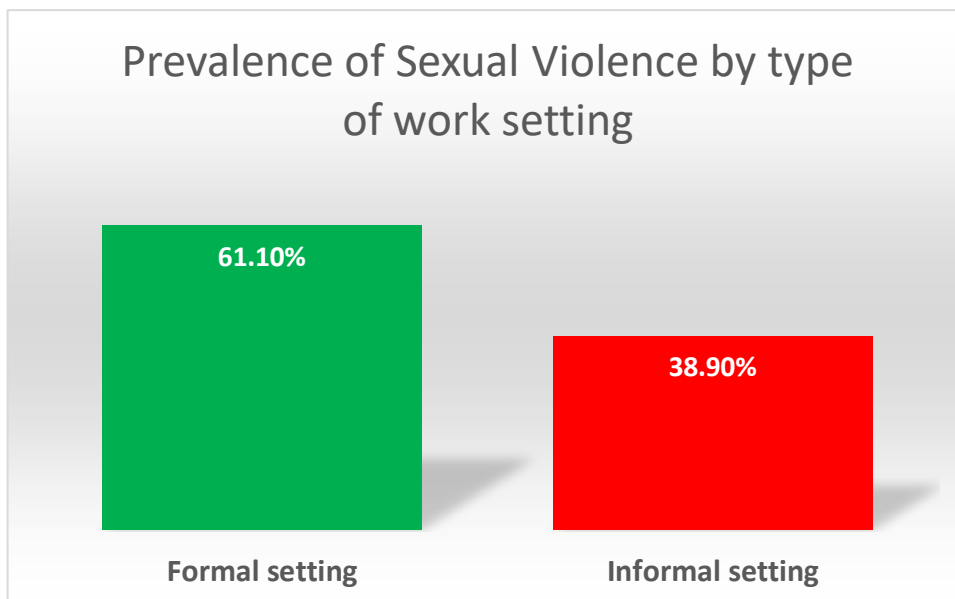


Figure 3: Prevalence of sexual violence among female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria according to their work setting

to the victims seen as intimate partners, male family members, acquaintances and individuals in position of authority. This invariably exposes victims to unprotected sexual acts which often lead to sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. In a study conducted in Egypt, verbal sexual harassment was

reported to be the most prevalent form of sexual violence where up to 99% of the women reported experiencing verbal sexual harassment and 12% experiencing rape²⁴. Other studies conducted by Marsh et al.¹⁸ and Noah² in Ethiopia and Southern part of Nigeria respectively revealed relatively lower rates of various forms of sexual violence.

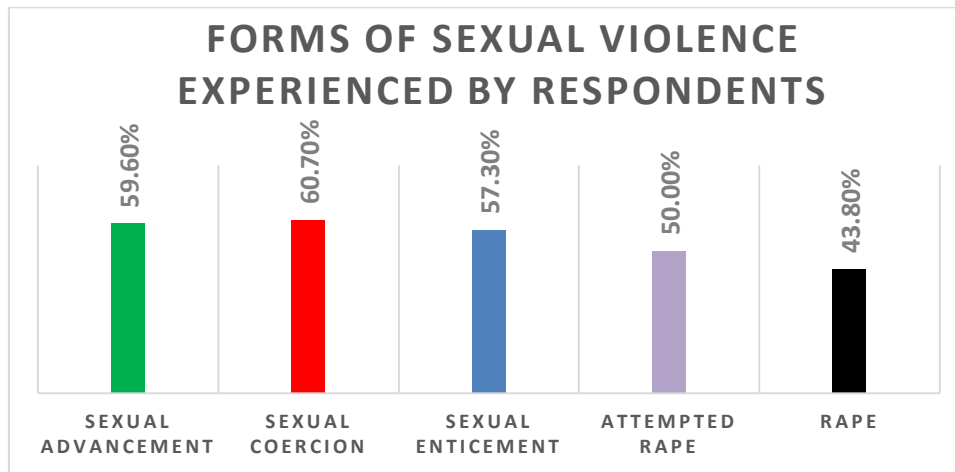


Figure 4: Forms of sexual violence experienced by female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria

Table 4: Experiences of sexual violence among female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria

Variables	Frequency (%) N=178
Experience sexual violence at workplace within the past one year?	
Yes	
No	97(54.5)
If experienced sexual violence, who was the perpetrator?	
Immediate boss	38(38.8)
Work mate	29(30.2)
Subordinate	21(21.7)
Others	9(9.3)
Frequent of sexual violence at workplace?	
Always	41(42.1)
Rarely	53(54.5)
Only once	3(3.4)
Did the sexual harassment in any way affect your work?	
Yes	62(64)
No	35(36)
Action taken following SV	
Resigned from the job	55(56.7)
Took leave	50(51.1)
Changed place of work	49(50.6)
Reported to the authority/police	50(51.1)
Did nothing	41(31.1)
*Multiple responses allowed	
If SV reported to the authority/police, was any action taken?	
Yes	24(47.2)
No	26(52.8)
If no report to the authority/police, why? (Multiple responses considered)	
Fear of the perpetrator	16(33.3)
No need to report	37(78.1)
Fear of shame/stigma	11(24.1)

The occurrence of the different forms of sexual violence in all these studies suggests the global nature of sexual violence in the workplace. The variations observed in the prevalence of the various forms of the violence could have resulted from differences in the socio-cultural characteristics of the respondents and their work environment.

About 38% of those that experienced sexual violence said it was perpetrated by their immediate bosses and this finding was further collaborated by findings from a study conducted by Jewkes and Abrahams who opined that the boss may threaten the female employee by loss of her job if she resists him¹⁶. Other studies have also demonstrated that female employees at the lower cadre are often the target of sexual harassment by their superiors^{28,29}. More than half of the respondents admitted that the sexual violence they experienced affected their work with more than half again saying they had to resign from the job as a result of the unbearable pressure in the work place. It has been shown that sexual violence can threaten the physical and psychological well-being of targets and may result in physical, mental, behavioral, and social consequences, depending on the circumstances; these consequences may be severe and long-lasting³⁰. Despite these varying experiences, 31.1% of the respondents that experienced sexual violence did not do anything following the incidence. This is often true of patriarchal societies like ours where females usually do not challenge accepted and laid down

Table 5: Factors associated with experience of sexual violence among female employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria

Variables	Ever experienced sexual violence at work?		Test statistic
	Yes	No	
Age (years)			
<20 years	4(57.7)	3(42.4)	df=3
20-29 years	58(61.7)	36(38.3)	P=0.804*
30-39 years	28(70)	12(30)	
40-49 years	7(70)	3(0)	
Marital status			
Married	37(71.2)	15(28.8)	X ² =1.76
Unmarried	59(60.2)	39(39.8)	df=1 P=0.213
Tribe			
Hausa	75(87.8)	28(27.2)	X ² = 16.97
Yoruba	9(56.3)	7(43.8)	df=3
Igbo	6(27.3)	16(72.7)	P<0.001
Others	7(70)	3(30)	
Religion			
Islam	83(74.1)	29(25.9)	p<0.001*
Christianity	13(35.1)	24(64.9)	
Others	1(50)	1(50)	
Work setting			
Formal	63(84)	12(16)	X ² =25.33df=1
Informal	34(44.7)	42(55.3)	p<0.001
Socioeconomic class			
Upper class	54(68.9)	25(31.2)	X ² =1.37
Middle class	30(61.2)	19(38.8)	df=2
Lower class	13(56.5)	10(43.5)	P=0.523
Length of time as a worker			
<5years	20(60.6)	13(39.4)	X ² =0.334
≥5years	74(66.1)	38(33.9)	df=1 P=0.679
Number of Working hours per day			
≤8hours			X ² =5.938
>8hours	86(68.3)	40(31.7)	df=1
	7(38.9)	11(61.1)	P=0.019
Does the society see sexual violence as a normal act?			
Yes	74(92.5)	6(7.5)	X ² =58.123df=1
No	23(32.9)	47(67.1)	P=<0.001
Do you think most women who are sexually assaulted by a man provoked his behavior by the way they talk, act or dress?			
Yes	89(74.8))	30(25.2)	X ² =27.214
No	8(25)	24(75)	df=1 P=<0.001
Is it only natural for a woman to use her sexuality as a way of getting ahead at work?			
Yes	84(72.4)	32(27.6)	X ² =14.56
No	13(37.1)	22(12.5)	df=1 P<0.001
Attitude towards sexual violence			
Positive attitude	90(64.3)	50(35.7)	X ² =0.002
Negative attitude	7(63.6)	4(36.4)	df=1 P=1.00
Knowledge of sexual violence			
Good	94(64.4)	52(35.6)	P=1.000*
Poor	3(0)	2(40)	

*Fischer's exact

Table 6: Predictors of sexual violence

Predictor	p-value	OR	95% C.I. for OR	
			Lower	Upper
The society sees SV as a normal act				
Yes	<0.001	0.062	0.020	0.193
Tribe				
Hausa	0.006	23.335	2.460	221.361
Yoruba	0.086	8.341	.739	94.136
Igbo	0.006	27.525	2.599	291.501
Work setting				
Formal	0.012	0.324	0.135	0.777

female norms for fear of retributions or being ostracized. On the other hand, most would not report for fear of stigmatization and shame as they could either be divorced if married or would not get suitors for marriage in case of unmarried ones. Jain *et al*³¹ also reported that abused females decide not to report being exposed to sexual violence for fear of embarrassment and a sense of deep shame; this, along with the fact that they fear reprisal attacks from the assailant. Also, El –Elemi and colleagues explained in another way that blame for sexual assault -in our community- usually is placed on females, while the perpetrators, if brought to justice, often escape with limited punishment³². This demonstrates the reality of the work environment in most developing countries including Nigeria where as a result of the harsh economic climate, workers are willing to stay put in their jobs even if they have nasty experiences like low pay, poor working condition and sexual harassment. This is not due to factor of job commitment, but rather because it is very difficult to secure another job elsewhere².

On bivariate analysis, factors found to be significantly associated with sexual violence in the workplace include tribe (p=0.002), religion (p<0.001), work setting (p<0.001) and society's perception of sexual violence (p<0.001). In a study conducted in Malaysia by Ismail et al, a significant association between physical attractiveness, sex roles, privacy of work area and sexual harassment was observed³³. This suggests that more attractive women have a higher risk of sexual harassment; a previous study also revealed that physically attractive women are perceived as sociable, dominant, warm and socially skilled³⁴.

However, on multivariate analysis using forward logistic regression for factors associated

with sexual violence in the work place, perception of the society on sexual violence was the strongest predictor of sexual violence in the workplace (p<0.001), followed by tribe and formal work setting (p=0.02). This compares to the findings of a previous study in Malaysia where women believed that they work in an environment where the belief system regards them as mere sex objects and inferior to men in terms of their capabilities and skills³³. In the same study, manner of dressing of female worker was found to be a predictor of sexual harassment³³.

In this study, those who believed the society sees sexual violence as a normal act are about 16 times less likely to experience sexual violence in the workplace (OR=0.062, p<0.001, 95% CI= 0.02-0.193). This is probably because this category of people is likely going to classify acts that are generally believed to be sexually violent acts as normal since they believe even the society sees those acts as normal. Respondents who are of the Hausa ethnic group are 23 times more likely to experience sexual violence in the workplace (OR=23.36, p=0.006, 95% CI=2.4-221.361). This is probably because of influence of culture on perception of individuals especially on sensitive issues like sexual violence, which, because it is socially constructed has various meaning depending on culture and personality of individuals²³.

Our study, as well as several others on this topic, relied on self-reported experiences of harassment and abuse, which possibly introduces response bias that may distort the results. This could be a limitation in this study; however, by promising anonymity in the conduct of the survey, research participants are more likely to report stigmatized behaviors.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Sokoto state Health Research and Ethics Committee. Participants were informed of the objectives of the study and were assured of the confidentiality of the information volunteered. Informed verbal consent was also obtained from all the respondents prior to the commencement of the study and were given options of opting out of the study should they decide to do so.

Conclusion

Majority of the respondents were aware and had good knowledge of sexual violence and most had positive attitude towards sexual violence. About two-thirds of the respondents had experienced sexual violence, with more than half experiencing it in the last one year. Governments and institutions should put in place mechanisms to address SV in the workplace and come to the aid of victims. Similarly, tougher sanctions should be put in place by necessary government agencies to bring to book perpetrators of this heinous crime against women.

Contribution of Authors

OMO and HA conceived the initial idea for the manuscript. ASM, ARO, SAM took part in the design of the questionnaire, supervised the data collection and wrote the first draft of the manuscript under the supervision and guidance of OMO and HA. All the authors contributed to the revision of the manuscript and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

We declare that, there is no conflict of interest.

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