

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG FEMALE STUDENT OF PREPARATORY SCHOOLS IN SODO TOWN, WOLAITA ZONE, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Sexual harassment is a common problem among women and it is a public health problem all over the world. Almost all females encounter sexual harassment in many different forms. In Ethiopia, studies on sexual harassment are limited.

OBJECTIVE: The study was conducted to assess sexual harassment and associated factors among female students of preparatory schools in Sodo Town, Wolaita Zone, Southern Ethiopia.

METHODS: School-based cross sectional study design was employed. Data were collected using Self-administered questionnaire among randomly selected female students from 11th and 12th grades. Data entry was done using Epi-data version 3.5.1 then the data were exported to SPSS version 20 statistical software for analysis. Bivariate and multivariable logistic regression analyses were used

RESULT: The prevalence of sexual harassment was 32.6 % (95 % CI: 28, 36). Educational status of father (AOR=0.470, CI=0.230, 0.962), female students living with mother only house (AOR=2.202, CI=1.302, 3.725), offensive sexual discussions (AOR=1.586, CI=1.013, 2.484), intimate relationship of female students with their teachers, (AOR=0.297, CI=0.198, 0.446) and orienting students about sexual harassment (AOR=0.676, CI=0.493, 0.925) were significantly associated with sexual harassment.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION: There is high prevalence of sexual harassment in the study area. Students living arrangement, offensive sexual discussions, intimate relationship of female students with their teachers, orientation of female students about sexual harassment were predictors of sexual harassment. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are recommended to design strategies for prevention of sexual harassment in the study area.

KEYWORDS: Female student, Ethiopia, Preparatory School, Sexual harassment

(The Ethiopian Journal of Reproductive Health; 2-20; 12;1: 9-17)

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment is typically defined self-report of unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention and is considered as a form of gender-based violence. If it is among youth encompasses acts that are sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from an education program or activity, or to create a hostile or abusive educational environment¹. Sexual harassment comes in different forms. It can include making verbal or written comments, making gestures, displaying pictures or images, using physical coercion, or any combination of these actions. It can take place in person or through electronic means such as text messages and social media. School staff can be harassers, but student peer-to-peer sexual harassment makes up the bulk of sexual harassment at middle and high schools².

According to the United Nations Declaration, sexual harassment is declared as violence against women which includes any act of physical and psychological harm or suffering to women. Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, 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 work³.

Prevalence of sexual violence victimization among young women ranges from 5% to 73% worldwide. The existence of sexual harassment in the society is undeniable, but what need to be investigated further are its precise nature, extent and impact particularly in learning institutions. In Sub - Saharan Africa, a study in Botswana shows, out of 422 girls interviewed, 38 percent reported that they had been sexually harassed^{4,5}.

To enhance the sexual and reproductive health and well-being of the young's population, Ethiopia had a national strategies and activities. Some of the strategies are delivery of all youth reproductive health related interventions and policies by gender, age, and residence and strengthening multicultural partnerships to respond to young women's heightened vulnerability to sexual violence and nonconsensual sex^{6,7}.

Studies conducted in Ambo district, Oromia region Ethiopia reported that 35.5% female students experienced sexual harassment throughout their school

life [1]. While, other study conducted in Hadiya Zone, Southern, Ethiopia reported that young women are socialized to be submissive to discuss issues related to sex and sexuality which leaves them unable to refuse sex or insist condom use. Women's economic dependence on men also leads young females to exchange sex for the sake of earning money⁸.

The study conducted in Bale Goba, Oromia, Ethiopia, 66% of the participants have faced unwanted sexual act such as asked to have sex, verbal jokes and comment on physical appearance in relation to sexuality in the lifetime⁹.

Therefore, this study was conducted to assess prevalence of sexual harassment and associated factors among female students of all preparatory schools, in Sodo Town, Wolaita Zone, Southern Ethiopia.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The study was conducted in Sodo Preparatory School located in Sodo town, in Wolaita Zone from February to March, 2017. The town is about 329 km away from Addis Ababa on away through Hossana to Arbaminch and 166 Kilometer from Hawassa, the regional city. The town has five preparatory schools among which two, namely Sodo Preparatory School, Maremiya Secondary & Preparatory school are public and Wolaita Liqa School, Chora Academic and Preparatory School and Bethlehem Academic and Preparatory School are private.

The school-based cross-sectional study design with quantitative data collection method was employed. The study population included all randomly selected female students from Sodo town preparatory schools. Respondents, who were acutely ill, at the time of the study, were supposed to be excluded from the study.

The sample size was calculated using single population proportion formula by considering the following assumptions: The prevalence of female students' sexual harassment is 35.5% taken from the study conducted in Ambo, Oromia Ethiopia [1]. With the level of confidence interval 95%, Margin of error (d) =5%, the sample size was 854 after considering 10% non-response rate and design effect of two.

Samples were selected by using stratified sampling

technique in the first stage. Simple random sampling method with proportional allocation to the size of population was used to select study participants. The numbers of the female students to be in the sample were calculated by proportional to their class size.

The questionnaires were prepared by reviewing relevant literatures (1.5, 9). Pre- test was done on 10% of the subjects at Bodit preparatory school. Data were collected through Pre-tested and self-administered structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was initially prepared in English and then translated into Amharic language. The Amharic version was again translated back to English language to check for any inconsistencies.

First, data were checked manually for its completeness and consistency. Each completed questionnaire was assigned a unique code and entered to Epi-data version 3.1. Then, data were exported into SPSS version 20 for data processing and analysis. Descriptive statistic and bivariate analysis followed by and multivariate logistic regression was used as appropriate. The degree of association between dependent and independent variables were assessed using odds ratio and coefficient with 95% confidence interval and p-value.

The dependent variable was sexual harassment while varied independent sociodemographic, individual and community factors such as living arrangement, access money were assessed. The following definition (measurements) were used:

- Sexual harassment: self-reporting of the girls in one or more of physical sexual, verbal or/and no-verbal acts against their will
- Physical sexual acts include sexual assault, rape, touching, kissing without the consent of the victim.
- Verbal acts include sexual suggestions, whistling, phone calls of a sexual nature or sexual related jokes and insults.
- Non-verbal acts encompasses unwelcomed gestures i.e. displaying pornographic materials or movies involving sex, rude finger signs, sending letters, short messages on phones or emails containing sexually clear or explicit remarks.

The study was reviewed and approved by Research

Ethics Review Committee, college of health science and medicine, Wolaita Sodo University. The purpose and the importance of the study were explained and verbal assent was sought from participants whose age was less than 18 years and written consent was obtained from their parents or guardians. Verbal consent was obtained from those whose age was greater than 18 years. Moreover, confidentiality of the information was provided by each respondent was kept secret by omitting the personal identifiers of the respondents.

RESULT

In this study, a total of 854 female students who are learning in both government and private preparatory schools, have responded the questions making the response rate 100%.

The mean age of respondents was 17.28 (+_1.431). Most of respondents age 15-19 years which accounts to 808(94.6%). Majority of the students (n=708, 82.9%) were learning in government owned school and 146 (17.1%) were private school students. Most of the respondents, were Wolaita by ethnicity (n=761, 89.1%), not attending their religions (n=290, 34%). Three hundred eleven (36.4 %) of the students reported that their mothers' educational status was writing and reading and 353 (41.3%) are complete of 10th and 12th grade and 46 (5.4%) only graduated from higher education institutions followed by illiterate which accounts 144 (16.9%). More than half of fathers 465 (54.4%) were able to read and write. Most parents of a study participant, 460(53.9%) were living together (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic and economic characteristics of preparatory female students in Sodo town, Wolaita zone, South Ethiopia, 2017

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age	15-19	808	94.6
	20-29	46	5.4
Schools identity	Government owned	708	82.9
	Private owned	146	17.1
Ethnicity	Wolaita	761	89.1
	Tigre	66	7.7
	Amhar	21	2.5
	Others	6	0.7
Religion	Protestant	517	60.5
	Orthodox	290	34.0
	Catholic	23	2.7
	Muslim	20	2.3
	Others	4	0.5
Education status of Mother	Illiterate	144	716.9
	Read and write	311	36.4
	Attended primary and secondary education	353	41.3
Education status of father	Attended secondary education and above	46	5.4
	Illiterate	80	9.4
	Read and write	465	54.4
	Attended primary and secondary education	190	22.2
Parents live together	Attended secondary education and above	119	13.9
	No	89	10.4
	Yes	765	89.6

Majority of the students (n=765, 89.6%) were living with both parents. More than half of the respondents, 439 (51.4%) were getting their pocket money from their parents but the rest 415(48.6%) were not getting pocket money from their parents. More than two-third, 730(85.5%) of the participants reported that they were provided school materials by their both parents. Regarding communicating sexual affair with family, 491 (57.5%) were not discussing on the issue with their family. Regarding hearing about sexual harassment, 420 (49.2%) never heard about sexual harassment from different sources (Table 2). Regarding to sexual

Table 2: Family factors of preparatory female students in Sodo town, Wolaita zone, South Ethiopia 2017

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Students live with	With both parents	765	89.6
	With mother only	89	10.4
Pocket money provided	No	415	48.6
	Yes	439	51.4
Scholastic materials provider	Both parents	730	85.5
	Father only	10	1.2
	Mother only	114	13.3
Communication with family members about sexual affairs openly?	No	491	57.5
	Yes	363	42.5
Seeing or hearing about harassment	No	420	49.2
	Yes	434	50.8

harassment, 32.6% of the participants experienced sexual harassment and 110 (12.9%) of the participants reported they were harassed by their school officials but, 168(19.7%) did not report it. Out of reported respondents, thirteen (1.5%) were claimed that the school officials never take action against the offenders, 29(3.4%) were noticed that the action was taken rarely and the other respondents reported that 35 (4.1%) and 33(3.9%) replied that the officials were taking action sometimes and always respectively.

When we see the reason of not reporting sexual harassment, out of 110 respondents, 49(44.5%) reported that they did not think anything would be done for them and the rest 21 (19.1%) , 21 (19.1%) and 19(17.3%) respondents feared negative social consequences, ashamed and did not know where to go respectively (Table3).

Table 3: Contribution of concerned bodies on sexual harassment

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Reporting sexual harassment	Yes	168	19.7
	No	110	12.9
	Not harassed	576	67.4
Reason for not reporting harassment(n=110)	Did not know where to go	19	17.3
	Felt ashamed	21	19.1
	Fear of negative social consequence	21	19.1
	expecting no response	49	44.5
Orientation given about harassment	Yes	393	46
	No	461	54

The overall prevalence of life time sexual harassment among the study participant was 32.6 % (95%CI: 28, 36). The prevalence of life time harassment among female school students in government is higher than those from private owned schools. 33.7% Vs 26.7%.

Out of those harassed female students in the life time, 113(13.2%) offended by sexual jokes or speech, 56(6.6%) forced to talk about sexual issues, 30(3.5%) were texted or phoned on unwanted sexual issue, 11(1.3%) were kissed without their will, 26(3%) were exposed for forceful sexual intercourse ,11(1.3%) were kissed without their will and 42(4.9%) were faced nonverbal sexual incidence and the rest did not harassed. Among those harassed nonverbally, 37(88.09%) faced rude finger signs and 5 (11.9%) harassed by short message through phone.

Among 278 harassed participants, 215(77.3%) reported that they were harassed at school compound. It also reported that most of the perpetrators, 147(52.8%) were students 9(3.2%) were teachers. The reasons for this harassment reported by 217(78.05%) respondents was promise to get money. As the result of this harassment, 138(49.6%) notified that they lost concentration on education and 133(47.8%) respondents contracted sexually transmitted disease. Regarding reporting sexual

harassment, 110(12.9%) reported, 168(19.7%) did not report and the rest 576(67.4%) never had been harassed. Most of the variables were lost their significance during multivariate analysis and only status of fathers' education, offensive sexual discussions, harassers relationship, living with either with both parents or not and orienting about harassment were statistically significantly associated with life time sexual harassment at P-Value < 0.05 after controlling all possible confounders.

In this study, Status of fathers' education has significant impact on sexual harassment: students from educated fathers were 53.0% (AOR=0.470, 95%CI=0.230, 0.962) less likely harassed when compared to students from illiterate fathers. The students who lived with only mothers were 2 times (AOR=2.202, 95%CI=1.302, 3.725) more likely to be sexually harassed when compared to those students who lived with both parents.

Offensive sexual discussions also expose students to sexual harassment. Those students faced offensive sexual discussions were 1.6 times (AOR=1.586, 95%CI=1.013, 2.484) more likely sexually harassed as compared to students that did not face offensive sexual discussions. The relationship of harassers towards students was risk factor for sexual harassment in this study. Those students who had relationship with teachers were 70.3% (AOR=0.297, 95%CI=0.198, 0.446) less likely harassed when compared to those study participants who had relation with students. Besides this, students oriented about sexual harassment either in school or other organization 34.2% (AOR=0.676, 95%CI=0.493, 0.925) were less likely to be harassed when compared with did not oriented (Table 4).

Table 4: Factors associated with sexual harassment during Bivariate and Multivariate analysis among the students in Wolaita Sodo town, 2017

Variables	Sexually harassed		COR 95% C	AOR 195% CI
	Yes (N, %)	No (N, %)		
School type				
Government	239(33.8)	469(66.2)	1	1
Private	39(26.7)	107(73.3)	0.715(0.480,1.075)	0.640(0.391,1.065)
Mothers' education				
Illiterate	43(29.9)	101(70.1)	1	1
Read and write	104(33.4)	207(66.6)	1.180(0.769, 1.810)	1.372(0.852,2.208)
Attended primary and secondary education	110(31.2)	243(68.8)	1.063(0.697,0.622)	1.131(0.708,1.806)
Attended secondary education and above	21(45.7)	25(54.3)	1.973(0.998, 3.899)	2.049(0.977, 4.296)
Fathers' education				
Illiterate	28(35.0)	52(65.0)	1	1
Read and write	156(33.5)	309(66.5)	0.938(0.570, 1.543)	1.232(0.712,2.131)
Attended primary and secondary education	117(61.6)	73(38.4)	1.159(0.672, 1.997)	1.452(0.799,2.640)
Attended secondary education and above	21(17.6)	98(82.4)	0.398(0.206,0.769)	0.470(0.230,0.962)
Living status				
Live with both parents	243(31.8)	522(68.2)	1	1
Live with mother only	35(39.3)	54(60.7)	1.392(0.886,2.187)	2.202(1.302,3.725)
Communication				
Yes	132(36.4)	231(63.6)	1.350(1.012, 1.802)	1.337(0.969, 1.844)
No	146(29.7)	345(70.3)	1	1
Harasser relationship				
Student	72(50.0)	72(50.0)	1	1
Friend other than student	8(53.3)	7(46.7)	1.143(0.394,3.317)	1.113(0.363, 3.410)
Family member	60(50.4)	59(49.6)	1.017(0.626,1.653)	0.847(0.501,1.432)
Teacher	138(24.0)	438(76.0)	0.315(0.216,0.460)	0.297(0.198,0.446)
Orientation about sexual intercourse				
Yes	112(28.5)	281(71.5)	0.708(0.530,0.947)	0.676(0.493,0.925)
No	166(36.0)	295(64.0)	1	1

COR= Crude Odds Ratio, AOR= Adjuster Odds Ratio

DISCUSSION

The prevalence of sexual harassment among female preparatory school students in Sodo town was 32.6.0 %. This finding is consistent with studies conducted among school students in Ghana, 30% and Mekelle town, Ethiopia (35%)^{10,11}. However, this finding is higher than a study conducted among female students of Arbaminch town, Ethiopia, which was 11 %¹². The result of this study also much lower when compared with the study conducted on female students in Ambo which resulted with 76.4%¹³. This discrepancy may be due to

social and cultural variation among various localities. Educational status of students' family was positively associated with reduction of sexual harassment. Female students whose Fathers' educational level was from higher institute graduate were 53.2% less likely sexually harassed when compared with those whose father educational status was illiterate. This finding is similar with a study conducted in Ambo University, where achieving secondary education by the father was associated with decreased sexual abuse¹³. The

possible reason could be as fathers' educational level is higher, they may give more attention to their daughters, understand their needs, discuss reproductive and sexual issues freely thereby transferring life skills could be easy; this strengthens the decision making capacity of their daughter against sexually abusive advances.

Our study also stated that female students' relationship with harassers was risk factor for to harassment. Those study participants who had relationship with teachers were 70.2% less likely sexually harassed when compared with those students who had relationship with classmates or students. This finding is similar with a study conducted among school children in Addis Ababa and Jimma, which showed that more episodes of sexual harassment were perpetrated by someone they closely know. The most frequent perpetrators were intimate partners¹⁴. Similarly, this finding is consistent with a study conducted in Bahirdar and Tanzania, Daresalam school children, which showed that the most common perpetrators were peers¹⁵. This is may be close relationship among peers and intimacy they develop and the time they spent together.

Orienting students about sexual harassment by either their schools or any other organization was significantly associated sexual harassment. Those students who were oriented about sexual harassment were 32.5 % less likely harassed when compared with students who were not oriented about sexual harassment. A similar finding was reported in as study in Kenya and Nigeria^{16,17}. The reasons could be due to the health system structure difference and awareness may be through health education at school. Media was the most reported source of information on risk of sexual harassment. Lack of discussion with parents followed by no clubs in the school was the most mentioned reasons for the lack of information on risk of sexual harassment.

This study was based on cross-sectional data, which implies that the direction of causal relationships cannot always be determined;

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study was conducted in Sodo town preparatory school female students regarding sexual harassment having the prevalence of 32.6%. In this study, Status of fathers' education at higher institute level has also significant impact on sexual harassment: students from educated fathers were less likely harassed when compared to students from illiterate fathers. The students who lived with only mothers were more likely to be sexually harassed when compared to those students who lived with both parents. Offensive sexual discussions were also exposed students to sexual harassment. Those students faced offensive sexual discussions were more likely sexually harassed as compared to students that did not face offensive sexual discussions. Those students who had relationship with teachers were less likely harassed when compared to those study participants who had relation with students. Besides this, students oriented about sexual harassment either in school or other organization were less likely to be harassed when compared with did not oriented.

Education offices should work on preventing and designing strategies to tackle sexual harassment through mini-media clubs and organizing peer education programs; Schools need to capacitate parents through training or orienting them about sexual harassment and its negative consequences. Parents should orient their children about sexual harassment so that they can discuss each other and develop awareness about sexual harassment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our gratitude goes to supervisors, data collectors, study respondents and Sodo town Education Department for facilitating the study.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Ashebir Thomas: had made substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data.

Amene Abebe and Bahailu Balcha involved in supervision of data collection, analysis and interpretation of data. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

FUNDING

This study has been sponsored by wolaita Sodo University

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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