Exploring Informal Learning on Sexual Violence and Abuse Among Female Undergraduate Students: A Case Study of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the informal security measures female undergraduate students at Obafemi Awolowo University use to avoid sexual violence and abuse. Six final-year students were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed using an in-depth interview guide. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Participants learned to protect themselves by exercising caution, avoiding trust in males, minimising interactions with lecturers, and concealing identities during examinations. They also limited time in faculty areas and avoided unfamiliar gatherings. The study shows the importance of addressing power dynamics and implementing comprehensive institutional responses to prevent sexual violence in Nigerian universities. Informal learning plays a crucial role in students' understanding and mitigation of sexual violence risks. The study demonstrates the need for institutions to prioritize student safety and well-being. The study recommends the University prioritises student safety and well-being through clear policies, training, and security measures.

Keywords: Informal learning, sexual harassment, sexual violence and abuse, victims of sexual violence and abuse, undergraduate female students

Introduction

Sexual violence and abuse (SVA) have emerged as a significant public concern due to their profound impact on victims. They encompass physical, social, and psychological consequences, posing a substantial threat to the victims. This issue serves as a stark indicator of the most severe breaches of human security globally

(Mezie-Okoye & Alamina, 2014). Instances of SVA occur when individuals are coerced, forced, or manipulated into sexual activity without their consent. Additionally, it encompasses situations where sexual relationships involve victims unable to resist sexual advances due to factors such as age, illness, disability, or substance influence, such as alcohol (Awosusi & Ogundana, 2015). According to Basil, Smith, Breiding, Black, and Mahendra (2014), sexual violence is the perpetration or attempted commission of a sexual act without the freely given consent of the victim or against an individual unable to consent. It encompasses various forms such as forced penetration, substance-facilitated incidents, non-physically pressured unwanted acts, such as verbal harassment (sexually suggestive comments, catcalling, unwanted sexual advances, sexual jokes or stories, derogatory comments), and non-verbal harassment (inappropriate gestures, sexually explicit emails or messages, displaying inappropriate materials, staring or leering, whistling or making sounds). Others include psychological or emotional pressure (threats of retaliation, manipulative behaviour, spreading rumours, persistent contact); and environmental harassment (creating a hostile environment, sexual graffiti, and inappropriate use of power). Other forms of SVA may also include digital or cyber harassment (unwanted sexting, cyberstalking, and non-consensual sharing), intentional touching, and coercion to engage in sexual acts.

WHO (2020) defines sexual violence as including non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact, acts of a sexual nature not involving contact (such as voyeurism or sexual harassment), sexual trafficking committed against someone unable to consent or refuse, and online exploitation. According to Joseph, (2015), sexual violence and abuse comprise three key elements: they are sexual in nature, intentional and repetitive, and unwelcome by the victims. Sexual violence and abuse find fertile ground in environments that foster secrecy and silence, spanning various spaces such as homes, schools, offices, commercial buildings, remote areas like bush paths and riversides, and even farms. Perpetrators of these acts include a wide range of individuals, from trusted family members and associates to strangers, fellow students, male friends, intimate partners, neighbours, colleagues, authority figures, and even religious leaders (Mejiuni et al., 2012; Mezie-Okoye & Alamina, 2014; Awosusi & Ogundana, 2015).

Several factors contribute to the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse, including sexual objectification, the abuse of trust and power, a culture of silence, victim blaming, stigmatisation, inadequate and ineffective implementation of policies on

sexual harassment, patriarchy, impunity, warped values, and poverty (Mejiuni et al., 2012; Okoroafor et al., 2014).

The alarming experiences of young female adults facing sexual violence and abuse in higher education institutions are underscored by the results of various studies, with media reports amplifying numerous stories of such incidents on campuses in Nigeria (Mezie-Okoye & Alamina, 2014). The issue of sexual violence and abuse represents a violation of the fundamental human rights of young female adults and poses significant security challenges on university campuses, specifically at Obafemi Awolowo University. Some institutions lack clear policies to address these concerns, while others with established policies often fall short of implementing effective mechanisms. For instance, the Faculty of Education at Obafemi Awolowo University took a commendable step in preventing and eradicating sexual harassment by establishing the Faculty of Education Anti-Sexual Harassment Action Committee in early 2017, four years after the University approved an Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy. This delay implies that undergraduate female students in the faculty who may have experienced sexual harassment, either by male academic staff or fellow students, might have been denied justice. Recognising the severity of sexual violence in Nigerian universities, the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) in 2015 expressed concern over inadequate policies addressing this menace. NFF states that:

The mass abuse of female university students in Nigeria is fuelled by the lack of a consistent and clear policy by university governing bodies and school authorities concerning sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape of female students. Student handbooks and codes of conduct for staff and students are generally 'silent' on this and do not adequately address issues of violence against women. Sexual assaults are hardly mentioned during orientation for first-year students nor are there any dedicated channels of redress or support for students who experience this form of violence whilst on campus (NFF 2015, p.551).

The lack of policies and proper strategies for their implementation, allow assailants to escape punishment, thereby creating an atmosphere conducive for continuing perpetration of the act. It would therefore appear that academic authorities are creating an environment of impunity on campuses by refusing to step in to protect women from assault (Goldhill & Bingham, 2015). Consequently, victims do not often report these cases. The vast majority of cases of sexual violence against female undergraduate students in Nigeria go unreported for various reasons associated with victim shaming, stigma, character assassination, public backlash,

and limited access to justice for victims. In many cases, female students who have reported such cases have been targeted for reprisal attacks by thugs, cultists, or University teachers (NFF, 2015). The peculiarity of the underreporting of rape and sexual violence in Nigeria is underlined by the deficiencies of the government to establish structures that would encourage victims to boldly come out (Aborisade, 2014). In a study that examined the prevalence of sexual assault on Southwest Nigerian girls, it was found that the majority of the rapists, even though confessed, are not apportioned the necessary punishment sequel to the offence committed (Odu et al., 2014). The report of a study that examined the perceived barriers to rape reporting among university female students in four University campuses in Nigeria, namely Tai Solarin University, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Lagos State University, and the University of Lagos, showed that fear of retaliation by their assailants dominated the concerns of the university rape victims (Aborisade, 2014).

This is an indication of a lack of adequate security for female students in our institutions of higher learning. Aborisade and Vaughan (2014) alert that victims of rape suffered secondary victimisation through the agents and process of the criminal justice system in Nigeria.

Given the prevalence of the culture of silence caused by the lack of policies against sexual violence and abuse, and proper strategies for their implementation, it is worthy to note that advancement in technology most especially social media has revolutionised the landscape of reporting cases of sexual violence and abuse, making the process more accessible and efficient. According to UNICEF (2021), there are six approaches in which technological applications and digital platforms are employed to address gender-based violence and champion gender equality. These include technology serving as a protective measure, a peer support system, a secure environment, a safeguard, a guide, and a responsive tool. According to the Council of Europe (2022), technological progress has allowed us to link up, exchange vital information, advocate for social causes, and promote awareness regarding infringements on human rights. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become powerful tools for victims of sexual violence and abuse to share their experiences, breaking the silence that often shrouds such incidents. These online spaces provide a sense of anonymity (Council of Europe, 2022), and security (UNICEF, 2021), empowering individuals to come forward and disclose their stories without fear of immediate physical repercussions. Moreover, social media's reach enables the rapid dissemination of information, fostering awareness and creating a collective voice against sexual violence.

According to Maryville University (2019), the power of social media can magnify voices, convey information instantly, and improve cooperation across various groups of individuals. The ease of reporting through these digital channels has played a crucial role in challenging societal norms, encouraging open discussions, and pushing for necessary changes in policies and attitudes toward addressing and preventing sexual abuse.

Ojoye (2018) reports that a female undergraduate at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State had accused a professor of harassment, alleging that he demanded sex to upgrade her failing grade in a recent examination. The scandal gained widespread attention when the student posted details of their conversation online. The lecturer purportedly insisted on multiple sexual encounters for a passing grade, leading to a breakdown in negotiations. Bamigbola (2018) later reports that the lecturer was sentenced to two years in prison for demanding sex to pass the student, thereby serving as a deterrent for lecturers engaging in such misconduct. In another report, Abba (2020) explains that the management of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, suspended a lecturer in the Department of International Relations, and placed him on half-pay following preliminary findings into allegations of sexual harassment by a female student. The student accused the lecturer of intimidation after rejecting his advances, leading to a thorough investigation and the subsequent suspension of the lecturer pending the panel's report. Faturoti (2020) reports that the authorities at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife suspended a tutor at the Centre for Distance Learning and handed him over to the police for alleged sexual harassment of a 19-year-old female student.

Agbor (2021) reports that the Governing Council of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, announced the dismissal of a lecturer in the Department of English Language on Monday, September 7, 2021, following allegations of sexual misconduct against a female student. The decision made during the University Council's session reflects the institution's zero-tolerance stance on sexual harassment. The dismissal stems from the findings of a joint committee that thoroughly investigated the case. The university emphasises its commitment to eliminating any form of sexual intimidation or coercion and applies appropriate sanctions in accordance with university regulations. According to Tyav (2021), the Governing Council of the Federal Polytechnic Bauchi has expelled two lecturers from the Department of General Studies and the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics Development. The institution's investigation committees determined their

culpability in cases of sexual harassment, leading to the decision. According to Ogwo (2022), the University of Abuja (UniAbuja) decided to terminate the employment of two professors on Monday, June 6, 2022, following allegations of sexual harassment. According to Ileyemi (2023), a lecturer from the University of Lagos (UNILAG) has been arrested by the Lagos State police for reportedly raping a 20-year-old undergraduate of the institution on August 16, 2023. Akintade (2023) has also conveyed that a protest has broken out at the University of Calabar's Faculty of Law in Cross River State. Female law students are demanding an end to the reported sexual assault and exploitation allegedly committed by the Dean of the Faculty of Law. Omidiji (2023) reports that a lecturer at Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ogun State, has been charged by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission for allegedly violating Section 8(1)(a) of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000, by allegedly demanding N100,000 from a victim in exchange for sex with the assurance of better academic marks. According to Akinfehinwa (2023), the administration of Kogi State Polytechnic terminated the employment of a senior lecturer in the Department of Language and Communication due to allegations of sexual harassment and victimisation involving a female student in the Department of Computer Science.

The reported cases of sexual violence and abuse in Nigerian tertiary institutions are alarming and indicative of a systemic problem. The fact that lecturers are using their positions of power to coerce students into sexual acts is a gross abuse of authority and a violation of human rights. The victims' bravery in coming forward highlight the need for a culture shift in our institutions, where survivors are supported and perpetrators are held accountable. The persistence of sexual harassment and assault on campuses also shows the need for more effective policies and enforcement mechanisms. Institutions must move beyond mere suspension or termination of perpetrators' appointments and implement comprehensive programmes to address the root causes of sexual violence. Moreover, the involvement of law enforcement and regulatory bodies like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) is crucial in addressing this issue. The prosecution of perpetrators and the implementation of policies like the Sex Offenders Register will serve as a deterrent and promote a culture of accountability.

Addressing sexual violence and abuse in Nigerian tertiary institutions is a complex challenge that requires a multi-layered solution. To create safer and more equitable learning environments, higher educational institutions must adopt a comprehensive approach that includes policy reforms, awareness and education, cultural shifts,

amplifying survivors' voices, and systemic change. Policy reforms are crucial to ensuring that existing laws and regulations are effective, inclusive, and survivor-centred. There must be a deliberate effort to also educate students, faculty, and staff about consent, sexual violence, and healthy relationships to create a culture of respect and empathy. In addition, the voices of survivors must be amplified to provide them with platforms to share their stories, access support, and receive justice. Furthermore, there must be advocacy for institutional changes that address the root causes of sexual violence and abuse and promote gender equality. With all stakeholders working together to implement these changes, academic excellence, personal growth, and social responsibility can be enhanced in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

This paper explores the awareness and understanding of sexual violence and abuse among young female adults in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Recognising the academic, health, social, and psychological challenges faced by victims, as well as the prevalent perception that justice is often elusive for them, the study delves into the informal learning experiences of female undergraduate students. Specifically, the focus is on the security measures these students have acquired informally to protect themselves against potential assailants. Informal learning emerges as a key theme in this investigation, shedding light on how young women in tertiary institutions equip themselves with knowledge and skills to navigate and mitigate the risks associated with sexual violence.

Informal learning has been integral to human existence for hundreds of thousands of years, predating the establishment of widespread formal and non-formal education systems (Schugurensky, 2015). According to Combs and Ahmed (1974), the majority of an individual's lifelong learning is attributed to informal learning. Throughout one's life, informal learning is an enduring and continuous process, involving the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competencies, insights, values, and attitudes (Akinsooto, 2022). Combs and Ahmed (1974) give a frequently cited definition of informal learning as:

> …the life-long process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally, informal education is unorganised, unsystematic, and even unintentional at

times, yet accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of a highly 'schooled' person (Combs & Ahmed, 1974, p.8).

Recognising various definitions, McGivney defines informal learning as:

> Learning that takes place outside a dedicated learning environment, which arises from the activities and interests of individuals or groups but which may not be recognized as learning (learning by doing, listening, observing, interacting with others, and so on). Non-course-based but intentional learning activities (which might include discussion, talks or presentations, information advice, and guidance) provided or facilitated in response to expressed interests and needs of people from a range of sectors and organisations (health, housing, social services, employment services, education, and training services, guidance services) (McGivney 1999: 1–2).

Livingstone (1999) asserts that informal learning is "any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops offered by educational or social agencies" (p.51)." It refers to learning events that are typically intentional yet unorganized and lacking a formal structure, taking place within the family, workplace, and everyday life, directed by the individual, family, or society (Golding et al., 2009). According to Marsick and Volpe (1999) cited in Akinsooto and Mejiuni (2014), informal learning means learning that is predominantly unstructured, experiential, and non-institutional. Informal learning encompasses any educational experiences that fall outside the curricula offered by formal and non-formal educational institutions and programmes (Schugurensky, 2015). It refers to learning events that are typically intentional yet unorganized and lacking a formal structure, taking place within the family, workplace, and everyday life, directed by the individual, family, or society (Colley et al., 2002). It occurs through conscious and unconscious attempts by individuals to understand their experiences and those of others, and through informal relationships and structures (Akinsooto & Mejiuni, 2014). In conscious informal learning, learners have control over what, how, where, and when they learn, while in its unconscious form, control is diffused, and the process typically lacks the involvement of individuals specifically designated as facilitators, instructors, or teachers (Mejiuni et al. 2015). Characterised by its unstructured and learner-driven nature, informal learning unfolds beyond traditional educational settings, allowing individuals to control their learning experiences, emphasising practical knowledge, communal engagement, and contextual adaptability, while involving the absence of a formal

teacher, non-education premises, learner-control, organic evolution, internally determined objectives reflecting oppressed groups' interests, accessibility based on published criteria, lower status, imprecise outcomes, communal service, learner-centric pedagogy mediated through leader democracy, and open-ended engagement, often taking a secondary or implicit significance in learning, and being inherently context-specific (Colley et al., 2002; Johnson & Majewska, 2022).

Based on the literature, Mejiuni et al. (2015) identify four types of informal learning and argue that they occur on a continuum as presented in Figure 1. The authors pointed out that although the continuum has been shaded to show the lightest, the most diffuse, almost unrecognisable form of informal learning (tacit learning), to the darkest, the most recognisable form of informal learning (self-directed learning), there are no real dividing lines between them, because movement is possible, usually to the right, between the types. They also showed that an individual can move from tacit learning of a subject matter to self-directed learning of the same subject matter.
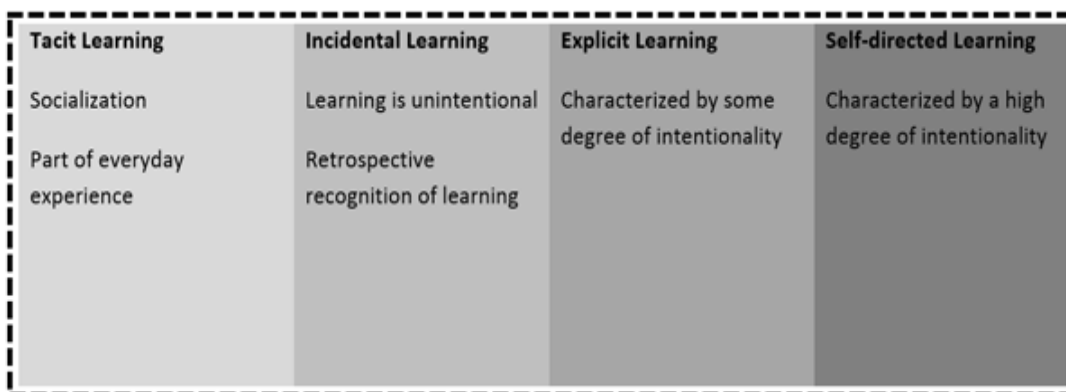
Tacit Learning	Incidental Learning	Explicit Learning	Self-directed Learning
Socialization	Learning is unintentional	Characterized by some degree of intentionality	Characterized by a high degree of intentionality
Part of everyday experience	Retrospective recognition of learning		

Figure 1: **Forms of informal learning on a continuum**

Source: Mejiuni, Cranton, and Taiwo (2015, p. xxvi)

Tacit learning is "mostly experiential, unconscious, and unplanned learning acquired in everyday life in interactions with others and the environment" (Hrimech, 2005). Tacit learning, also known as socialisation pertains to the nearly instinctive internalisation of values, attitudes, behaviours, skills, and knowledge that takes place in everyday experiences (Schugurensky, 2015). Incidental learning is learning that occurs during everyday interactions with some degree of the participation of the individual, usually unintentionally, in the process of knowledge construction (Mejiuni et al., 2015). That is, it occurs when the learner has no prior intention of learning something from that particular experience (Schugurensky,

2015). The individual becomes aware that learning has occurred during reflection upon incidents, practices, and processes that they participated in or witnessed. Explicit learning involves the deliberate acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes by the person(s), but their degree of intentionality in this respect is low. Self–directed learning (SDL) is learning in which learners exhibit a high degree of intentionality in the pursuit of learning (Mejiuni et al., 2015). It is "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). It is the acquisition of knowledge, skill, achievement, or personal development that an individual actively chooses and achieves through their efforts, employing any method, in any circumstances, and at any time (Gibbons, 2002). According to Merriam et al. (2007), the three main objectives of self-directed learning are to: 1) enhance the ability of learners to be self-determined in their studies; 2) foster transformational learning; and 3) promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of SDL. So, while tacit and incidental learning is unintentional, explicit and self-directed learning are intentional forms of informal learning.

Informal learning has had a profound impact on human existence, shaping our knowledge, skills, and attitudes in subtle yet significant ways for hundreds of thousands of years (Schugurensky, 2015). Combs and Ahmed (1974) describe it as a lifelong process that accounts for the bulk of our learning experiences. The various definitions of informal learning highlight its intentionality and non-formal nature (McGivney, 1999), as well as its unstructured and experiential aspects (Livingstone, 1999; Marsick & Volpe, 1999). The continuum of informal learning proposed by Mejiuni, Cranton, and Taiwo (2015) acknowledges the fluidity and complexity of this concept, comprising tacit learning, incidental learning, explicit learning, and self-directed learning, each with its level of intentionality. When applying these theories to the experiences of female students learning to guard against sexual violence, the importance of intentionality and awareness in their learning processes becomes clear.

This study draws on the conceptual model presented by Mejiuni et al. (2015) to explore how female undergraduate students at Obafemi Awolowo University informally learn security measures to avoid sexual violence and abuse. This model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding different types of informal learning, which closely aligns with the findings of this study. By using this

conceptual model, the study aims to assess the degree of intentionality in participants' learning processes and their ability to mitigate the risk of sexual violence and abuse. Therefore, the focus on informal learning experiences related to sexual violence and abuse is inherent in the theoretical framework and aligns closely with the specific types of informal learning outlined by Mejiuni et al. (2015). In the course of the analysis and discussions of female students' informal learning measures to guard against sexual violence, the author locates the participants' learning experiences along the continuum delineated by Mejiuni et al. (2015), which offers a framework for understanding the degree of intentionality characterising their learning in the context of sexual violence and abuse. By employing this continuum, the study aims to assess whether participants have acquired knowledge and skills to protect themselves from sexual violence. This approach facilitates a nuanced examination of the participants' informal learning processes and their effectiveness in mitigating the risk of sexual abuse and violence. Through this framework, the study not only connects the theoretical underpinnings to the empirical investigation but also provides valuable insights into the participants' agency and resilience in safeguarding their well-being.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive case study research design. This design was used for this study because it is the design usually recommended for exploring in-depth and gaining a holistic understanding of a phenomenon being studied in a specific real-life context. The case study research design is considered appropriate when the phenomenon being studied is linked with the context in which it takes place (Merriam, 2005). In this case, the phenomenon is the informal learning of security measures by female undergraduate students to avoid becoming victims of sexual violence and abuse. The population for the study consisted of all female undergraduate students who were in their final year in all thirteen faculties in Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. The choice of this category of students became necessary because the author believed that they are potential victims and the chances that they would personally have experienced one form of sexual violence and abuse is very high given the number of years they have spent in the university. The sample for this study consisted of six female undergraduate students who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling process involved selecting a small, focused group of female final-year undergraduates based on specific criteria related to their potential experiences with sexual abuse and violence. Participants were chosen due to their advanced stage in

their university education, which was believed to increase their exposure to or awareness of the issue. Additionally, their willingness to discuss their experiences was a key factor in their selection. The sampling approach aimed to gather rich, in-depth perspectives by focusing on individuals who were most relevant to the study's objectives. Participants were recruited through targeted outreach, ensuring that their selection aligned with the study's goals for detailed qualitative insights.

An In-depth Interview Guide (IDI) was used for data collection on participants' knowledge and the security measures they have learned to protect themselves from sexual violence and abuse. The interviews allowed for detailed and personal accounts of their experiences and perceptions. The author personally conducted the interviews to ensure consistency and rapport with the participants. The interviews were recorded on tape and were transcribed. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. This method involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the qualitative data, providing a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences and the informal security measures they have adopted.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that at least two of the interviewees had personally experienced sexual abuse and violence within Obafemi Awolowo University. While previous reports have documented instances of sexual misconduct by faculty members, such as the dismissal of a lecturer in the Department of English Language, this study provides direct, personal accounts from students. These first-hand experiences underscore that sexual violence is not just an isolated issue but a pervasive problem within the university community. This qualitative evidence adds a crucial layer of understanding to the systemic issue previously reported, highlighting the lived experiences of those affected. The interviewees' experiences with sexual violence are diverse, occurring not only within Obafemi Awolowo University but also on other campuses where they studied for the Nigeria Certificate in Education. Additionally, one interviewee had an experience outside the campus setting. All interviewees, regardless of personal experiences, reported hearing stories and reading about sexual violence and abuse in other locations and campuses, emphasising the broader awareness of the issue beyond their own encounters. They indicated that they had engaged in informal learning based on their own experiences and the experiences of others. These experiences were analysed through coding of words and phrases. This analysis process generated themes that revealed patterns or commonalities in the measures participants use to navigate or cope with the threat of sexual violence and abuse. The themes were

then organised into informal lessons, highlighting the key words and phrases around which participants built their experiences.

Exercise caution and refrain from placing trust in individuals of the opposite sex

All the interviewed students said they had learned not to trust any person of the opposite sex no matter how close an individual is to them. From their personal experiences and the experiences of others, they discovered that people they trust and who others trust are often the assailants.

This indicates that, based on the interviews conducted, all the interviewed students had developed a general scepticism or lack of trust towards individuals of the opposite sex, regardless of how close they may be to them personally. The reason for this lack of trust is explained further in the statement, stating that their learning stems from both personal experiences and the experiences of others. The students had observed that individuals they and others trusted, often those in close relationships, were found to be perpetrators of sexual assault. This realisation has led them to adopt a cautious approach, implying that closeness or trustworthiness in other aspects of a relationship may not necessarily preclude someone from being an assailant in cases of sexual violence and abuse. For example, one interviewee said:

> I have learned that I should not trust anyone of the opposite sex totally and assume that we're just friends, he can do me nothing or that he's my lecturer, he's old enough to be my grandfather, he can't be like that, he's a Christian, I'll go to his office.

The respondent learned to be wary of trusting others, irrespective of the apparent nature of their relationship or the perceived trustworthiness of the individual. This mistrust extends to various types of relationships and individuals, including friends, lecturers, and religious figures. The respondent no longer assumes that friends are automatically safe or harmless, showing that even the closest person can potentially cause harm. Likewise, one participant expressed caution even towards lecturers, including those who might seem harmless due to their age or perceived moral standing. This reveals an awareness that authority figures and older individuals, who might typically be seen as protective or non-threatening, can also be perpetrators of inappropriate behaviour. Even religious figures, typically associated with moral integrity, are not exempt from the respondent's scepticism, as they understand that outward appearances or affiliations do not necessarily reflect an

individual's true behaviour. This heightened awareness and cautious approach to trust reflect the respondent's experiences and understanding of the potential for harm in various relationships.

Avoid one-on-one interaction with lecturers

Two of the interviewees said that they learned not to be close to lecturers as they could take advantage of such closeness to perpetrate sexual harassment. One of them said:

> There was a time when a lecturer, who is married with two children, from another faculty but who was my neighbour in town when I was in 100 level started asking me out but turned him down each time. I noticed that after turning him down he finds it so easy to borrow things from me at odd hours. There was a time because of the familiarity, he offered to give me a ride to school. On our way to university, he started making some advances to me like rubbing my legs which I turned down and when he came to my place later that day, I had to lie to him that I was tired and that I was having my menstruation. After that, I stopped accepting his free offers to take me to university and I stopped responding to him whenever he came to my place. Ever since I don't pick his calls and blocked him on WhatsApp.

The two interviewees expressed a learned behaviour of avoiding closeness with lecturers. The reason cited is the belief that such proximity can be exploited by lecturers to engage in sexual harassment. This suggests a perception or awareness among the interviewees that maintaining a certain distance from academic staff is a precautionary measure to reduce the risk of experiencing sexual harassment.

The lecturer's actions, such as asking the narrator out, making physical advances (rubbing the legs), and persistent behaviour despite rejection, suggest inappropriate and unwelcome advances. He took advantage of the narrator's trust and familiarity; given that they were neighbours in town. The interviewee noticed a pattern where, after being rejected romantically, the lecturer would conveniently borrow things at odd hours. The participants experienced discomfort and felt compelled to create excuses (like being tired or having menstruation) to avoid further advances. This indicates a need for her to establish personal boundaries, and took assertive measures to protect herself by stopping the acceptance of free rides, avoiding the lecturer's visits, not responding to calls, and blocking the lecturer on WhatsApp. These actions suggest a proactive approach to distance herself from the uncomfortable situation.

The relationship described by one of the two interviewees began as a neighbourly one rather than a typical lecturer-student relationship. However, the dynamics of their interaction shifted due to the lecturer's advances, which were inappropriate and unwanted. Although their familiarity was initially based on their status as neighbours, the lecturer's position of authority as an academic staff member added a layer of complexity. The advances made by the lecturer were perceived by the interviewee through the lens of his academic status, which could potentially influence her academic experience and sense of safety within the university environment.

This incident highlights the power imbalance inherent in any interaction between students and academic staff, even if they do not have a direct academic relationship. It underscores the need for clear ethical guidelines and boundaries for lecturers, regardless of whether they directly teach the students they interact with to prevent any form of misconduct and ensure a safe learning environment. Moreover, this incident contributed to the interviewee's broader mistrust of interactions with lecturers, reinforcing the necessity for robust policies and support systems to address and prevent sexual abuse and violence, ensuring that students feel safe in all aspects of their university life.

The findings highlight the importance of addressing misconceptions and ensuring that defensive behaviours do not stem from fear of general harassment but rather from specific incidents. Universities should work towards creating a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable seeking mentorship without fear.

Avoid talking in class

Two interviewees specifically said they have learned to avoid asking or answering questions in class. They said they have observed and heard that some male lecturers often target female students who talk in class. They said the lecturers often asked those students after the class to see them in their offices. This, according to them, is how they get their victims. One of these interviewees said:

> I have stopped asking or answering questions in class because this is mostly how they notice female students and once one is noticed, that might be the beginning of carryover or even extra semesters and reduced grades.

The two interviewees expressed a learned behaviour of reframing from asking or answering questions in class. This suggests that they fear being targeted by some male lecturers who, according to their observations and information, tend to focus

on female students who actively participate in class discussions. The interviewees believed that actively participating in class, particularly by asking or answering questions, may lead to unwanted attention from male lecturers. The mention of these lecturers asking students to see them in their offices implies a concern that such interactions could be exploited or misused. The decision to avoid asking or answering questions in class can be seen as a preventive measure taken by the interviewees to reduce the likelihood of being targeted or approached inappropriately by certain male lecturers. This indicates a perception among the interviewees that being asked to visit a lecturer's office after class might be a strategy used to select victims. This implies a level of caution and suspicion regarding private interactions with lecturers.

The implications of this behaviour are significant. Firstly, it shows a coping mechanism employed by female students to navigate and protect themselves within the university environment. Secondly, it reveals the underlying issues of mistrust and fear of exploitation, which can negatively impact students' academic engagement and participation. The fact that students feel compelled to limit their classroom participation to avoid potential victimization underscores the need for institutional measures to address and prevent sexual harassment and abuse. This includes implementing clear ethical guidelines and boundaries for lecturers, as well as providing safe channels for students to report any inappropriate behaviour without fear of repercussions.

Use of "hijab"

A Muslim interviewee said she has learned to use "hijab" to protect herself. According to her, men generally respect and perceive ladies using the veil as spiritual so nobody would want to mess with them. She said:

> I had an experience with a male lecturer in my department. We got close because he always sends me on errand and that was why I was always going to his office. He started making advances and this got me scared. This got me uncomfortable anytime he called to send me on errands. In my mosque, we observe sisters' circle every Friday, and Muslim ladies share their experiences with one another. A lady shared her experience which was exactly what was happening to me. The coordinator of the sisters' circle suggested she started using "hijab" after she had asked her how she normally dresses whenever she went to the lecturer's office. The coordinator told her the use of "hijab" would lower the lecturer's gaze on her and other prying eyes of men that could make them try sexual advances

towards her. I learned from this and I started using "hijab" and this reduces the advances of the lecturer towards me and that made me scale through my National Certificate in Education programme.

The Muslim interviewee had learned to use the "hijab" as a protective measure. She believes that men generally respect and perceive women wearing the veil as spiritual, which creates a barrier and discourages inappropriate behaviour. This implies a cultural and religious strategy to ward off unwanted advances. The interviewee's decision to use the hijab stems from a personal experience with a male lecturer who began making advances towards her. The discomfort she felt during interactions with the lecturer prompted her to seek advice. The interviewee sought guidance from her mosque's sisters' circle, where Muslim women share their experiences. Another woman in a similar situation shared her experience, and the coordinator of the circle suggested using the hijab as a protective measure. This highlights the role of community support and advice in influencing the interviewee's choice. The interviewee's adoption of the hijab resulted in a reduction of advances from the lecturer, enabling her to navigate through her academic pursuits successfully. This suggests that the practical implementation of cultural and religious practices can have a tangible impact on personal safety and well-being.

This account underscores the lengths to which female students sometimes go to protect themselves from sexual harassment and abuse. It also highlights the role of community support and cultural practices in coping with and mitigating such challenges. The interviewee's experience points to the need for stronger institutional measures to prevent sexual harassment and provide safe environments for students, where they do not feel the need to alter their behaviour or appearance to avoid victimization.

Discontinue the practice of greeting lecturers

One interviewee said she had learned to stop greeting lecturers because of the experience she had. She said:

I have stopped greeting lecturers. The first time a lecturer wooed me, it was because I greeted him. He parked his vehicle, rolled down the window glass, and asked me to come to his office and I didn't go. Each time he saw me he would ask me to come and see him in his office. This happened four times. Since I hadn't learned my lesson, the same thing happened with different lecturers.

The interviewee has learned from personal experience that initiating or responding to greetings from lecturers might lead to unwanted advances. The finding implies that the initial interaction of greeting a lecturer resulted in persistent invitations to the lecturer's office, creating discomfort for the interviewee. The interviewee's experience is not isolated to a single lecturer; rather, it has occurred with different lecturers. This suggests a pattern of behaviour or a systemic issue within the academic environment. The interviewee's decision to stop greeting lecturers is a proactive measure taken to avoid unwarranted advances and uncomfortable situations. This implies a learned behaviour of self-protection and a reluctance to engage in casual or friendly interactions with lecturers. The interviewee explicitly mentions not having learned her lesson after the initial encounter, and similar incidents occurred with different lecturers. This highlights the iterative nature of the issue and how the interviewee's experiences informally shaped her behaviour over time.

Limit one's time in the faculty

One interviewee said she had learned not to spend much time in her faculty so as not to be noticed by lecturers. She said:

> I have stopped spending so much time at my faculty because spending time makes them notice you. I do not collect any male lecturer's bag or assist them with any load because this will land me in their offices. Another reason why I don't spend time in my faculty anymore is because some of these lecturers tend to draw female students closer by sending them on errands. For example, they might ask the students to collect something from a particular office and bring it to theirs, they may give the students some papers and some money to make photocopy and bring it to their offices and so on. So as to avoid being in such situations, I try as much as possible to stay away from the faculty.

The interviewee has modified her behaviour by limiting the time spent in her faculty. The primary reason for this adjustment is the interviewee's awareness that spending extended periods in the faculty may attract the attention of male lecturers. She expresses a proactive approach to avoid being noticed by lecturers, highlighting concerns that extended interactions, such as assisting with tasks like carrying bags or running errands, could potentially lead to unwanted advances or invitations to lecturers' offices. The interviewee also mentions an additional reason for limiting her time in the faculty, emphasising that some lecturers tend to draw female students closer by assigning them various errands. To avoid potentially

uncomfortable situations or advances, she opts to stay away from the faculty as much as possible. This implies a strategy of minimising opportunities for interaction with lecturers that could lead to compromising situations.

The interviewee's description of how some lecturers use errands to draw female students closer underscores unequal power dynamics. Lecturers leveraging their authority to create situations where students feel obligated to visit their offices for non-academic reasons raises concerns about exploitation and boundary violations. The decision to stay away from the faculty impacts the interviewee's academic experience. By avoiding spaces where learning and collaboration should thrive, she may miss out on educational opportunities or feel disconnected from academic activities, potentially affecting her overall engagement and performance.

Concealing identities during examinations

One of the interviewees said:

> I have learned to always cover my name and matric number in the examination hall as I've learned over time that some of these lecturers master female students' matriculation numbers or names and then paste such names and numbers and ask them to see them. Of course, a student who cares about her academics will definitely go to see such a lecturer oblivious of the trap.

The interviewee has developed a practice of hiding her identity during examinations. The reason behind this behaviour is a perceived risk that some lecturers may intentionally memorise the matriculation numbers or names of female students. Subsequently, these lecturers might create a scenario where they ask the identified students to see them, potentially setting a trap. This suggests that the interviewee has become cautious and proactive in protecting herself from potential unwarranted advances or uncomfortable situations. By concealing her name and matriculation number during examinations, the interviewee seeks to avoid being specifically targeted or identified by certain lecturers who may exploit their knowledge of students' details.

Steer clear of unfamiliar gatherings

Steering clear of unfamiliar gatherings shows the importance of being cautious and avoiding events and gatherings that are unknown and unrecognised, highlighting the value of safety and prudence in such situations.

The underlying message is a call for vigilance when considering participation in activities where the environment or the individuals involved are unfamiliar. This comes from one interviewee who disclosed that her brother had shared a distressing account of young girls being subjected to sexual assault during his first university carnival experience. In response to this alarming revelation, the interviewee had earnestly heeded her brother's cautionary advice. Specifically, she has chosen to abstain from attending gatherings such as picnics, nightclubs, and late-night parties. This decision is a direct consequence of her awareness of the risks associated with such events, as highlighted by her brother's story. The inference drawn from this narrative is that the interviewee's behaviour has been significantly influenced by her brother's warning, indicating a heightened sense of awareness and wariness. This influence has led her to adopt a proactive stance towards personal safety, demonstrating a deliberate and thoughtful approach in selecting the gatherings she attends. This cautiousness is particularly directed towards events involving substantial crowds or unfamiliar settings, underscoring the significance of the interviewee's trust in her brother's shared experiences and advice.

The data analysis reveals a complex landscape of experiences related to sexual violence and abuse within the university community, particularly at Obafemi Awolowo University. It reveals a collective consciousness and resilience in the face of these challenges. It reinforces the existing understanding that the students interviewed possess a heightened awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse on campus. The perpetrators, identified as both male students and lecturers, bring to light the power dynamics embedded in the student-lecturer relationship. Remarkably, male lecturers were more frequently cited as the perpetrators, underscoring the influential roles and authority they hold within the academic setting.

The acknowledgment of power resources wielded by lecturers, including expert knowledge and grading authority, accentuates the potential for exploitation within this power dynamic. The recognition that power resources can be used either positively, to enhance the capabilities of others or negatively, to inhibit the capacities of others (Mejiuni, 2012), aligns with the students' experiences and stories shared about the misuse of authority by some lecturers. This power imbalance forms the backdrop against which the measures employed by the interviewees to protect themselves take shape.

The students' knowledge of assailants' strategies, derived from personal experiences, stories of others, and external sources, serves as the foundation for the

security measures they have adopted. These strategies learned through incidental and explicit informal learning, highlight the conscious effort made by the students to equip themselves with protective measures against sexual violence and abuse. The acknowledgment that these strategies are especially geared towards safeguarding against male lecturers reinforces the pervasive influence of the power dynamics in the academic environment.

The concerns raised about the safety of Nigerian university campuses, expressed by all the students interviewed, further emphasise the gravity of the issue. The cited instances of harassment and assault, such as male students ambushing female students at night or incidents of rape in university spaces, contribute to the students' perception of an unsafe environment. This collective sentiment indicates a broader societal issue that extends beyond individual experiences.

Attribution to the Conceptual Model of Informal Learning Continuum

The findings of this study closely align with specific types of informal learning outlined in the conceptual model presented by Mejiuni et al. (2015). As identified in the literature review, Mejiuni et al. (2015) proposed a continuum of informal learning, ranging from tacit learning to self-directed learning, with various degrees of intentionality. The interviewees' experiences and strategies for safeguarding against sexual violence can be situated along this continuum. For instance, the behaviours exhibited by the interviewees, such as actively avoiding one-on-one interactions with lecturers and refraining from participating in class discussions, can be understood as manifestations of intentional informal learning. These actions reflect a conscious effort on the part of the interviewees to mitigate the risk of encountering sexual harassment or abuse within the academic environment. By intentionally modifying their behaviour in response to perceived threats, the interviewees demonstrate agency and autonomy in their learning process, signalling a progression towards self-directed learning.

Similarly, the adoption of cultural practices, such as wearing the hijab as a protective measure, can be interpreted as a form of tacit learning. Shugurensky (2000) defines tacit learning the process of internalising values, attitudes, behaviours, skills, and so on through everyday life experiences. Through observance and adherence to cultural norms and beliefs, the interviewee seeks to create a psychological and physical barrier against unwanted advances. This practice illustrates the role of experiential and implicit learning in shaping individuals' responses to potential threats. By internalising cultural teachings and

social expectations, the interviewee leverages tacit knowledge to navigate and negotiate social interactions, thereby enhancing personal safety and well-being.

In both cases, the interviewees' behaviours exemplify the dynamic nature of informal learning processes within the context of addressing complex social issues such as sexual violence. By adapting and responding to their environment, the interviewees engage in a continual process of learning and adaptation, drawing upon both intentional and tacit forms of learning to inform their actions and decisions. This holistic approach to learning underscores the interconnectedness of individual experiences, cultural influences, and social dynamics in shaping responses to adversity and promoting resilience.

Furthermore, the interviewees' decisions to limit their time in the faculty and conceal their identities during examinations reflect aspects of both self-directed learning and tacit learning within the informal learning continuum (Mejiuni et al 2015). These proactive strategies represent deliberate actions taken by individuals to mitigate the risk of encountering sexual violence or abuse. The choice to limit time spent in certain environments and to conceal identities during examinations can be seen as instances of self-directed learning, where individuals exercise agency and autonomy in safeguarding themselves against potential harm. Simultaneously, these behaviours also demonstrate elements of tacit learning, as individuals draw upon their tacit knowledge and experiences to inform their protective measures. By adapting and refining their strategies based on their observations and experiences, the interviewees exemplify the dynamic nature of informal learning processes within the context of addressing complex social issues such as sexual violence.

By contextualising the findings within the framework of informal learning, this study underscores the dynamic nature of individuals' responses to threats of sexual violence. It emphasises the importance of considering informal learning processes in understanding and addressing complex social issues within educational settings.

Conclusion

The exploration into the dynamics of sexual violence within university settings underscores the crucial influence of power dynamics in its perpetuation. The proactive adoption of protective measures by students illuminates the vital role of informal learning in navigating and mitigating the risks associated with these power imbalances. Recognising the unsafe nature of Nigerian university campuses, there is a pressing need for comprehensive institutional responses to address and prevent

sexual violence, fostering a safer and more conducive learning environment. Additionally, insights from student interviews reveal a nuanced understanding of sexual violence prevalence on campus. The student's awareness and knowledge of protective measures, particularly against potential misconduct by male lecturers, highlight the pivotal role of informal learning. Their comprehension of sexual violence did not stem from formal education but rather from incidental learning experiences. Importantly, the measures for protection emerged from a blend of incidental and explicit informal learning, demonstrating a conscious effort to seek out ways to safeguard against sexual abuse. This dual nature of learning emphasises the importance of institutions recognising and integrating both formal and informal educational approaches to effectively address and prevent sexual violence on university campuses.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Establish clear policies against sexual violence and harassment, ensure they are well-communicated, and enforce strict disciplinary actions against perpetrators.

2. Create a confidential and accessible reporting system for victims and witnesses, supported by a dedicated task force.

3. Conduct mandatory training on sexual violence, consent, and bystander intervention for students and staff, and develop awareness campaigns and workshops to educate the university community about sexual abuse and violence and available support resources.

4. Increase security presence, improve campus lighting, ensure safe transportation options, especially at night, and establish support centres for immediate help, counselling, and guidance on dealing with sexual violence.

5. Encourage open dialogue about sexual violence through forums and town hall meetings, involving all university members; foster gender sensitivity and inclusivity; and engage male students and staff in anti-violence initiatives.

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