

Broken home, sexual harassment, and educational outcome: Evidence from higher institutions in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

We examine the effects of broken-home and sexual harassment on the educational performance of undergraduate students of some selected universities in northern Nigeria. Data for the study was collected using an online survey form (google form) which was distributed to the targeted participants through email, WhatsApp, and Facebook respectively. Relevant information on variables of interest for the study was collected from 6 tertiary institutions consisting of one Federal and one State University each from the 3 geopolitical zones of northern Nigeria. Overall, 178 undergraduate students who are in the final year of their program voluntarily participated in the survey and the data was analysed using ordered logistic regression analysis. We find a negative effect between broken home and educational performance whereas, though there exists a negative effect between sexual harassment and educational performance but it is found to be not statistically different from zero. We control for parental socioeconomic status and the demographic characteristics of the students. Based on empirical findings from the study we conclude that broken home has serious negative effects on students' academic performance. Evidence from the study have both short-run and long-run implications on the Nigerian economy; the long-run implications also have two negative broad dimensions in form of labor market participation and gross reward for labor which may impede growth and development in the long run. Hence, the need for strategic interventions by relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: Academic performance, Broken home, Higher education, Labor market participation, Sexual harassment.

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Highlights of this paper

- This study is unique from previous studies on sexual harassment by focusing on the likelihood of its effects on academic performance of the victims of this scandalous and persistent behavior in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- Though, the study attempted to also examine how broken home affects academic performance of the sampled population, it does not in any way attempt to evaluate whether students from broken home are more prone to sexual harassment or otherwise.
- Empirical evidence from the study has both short run and long run implications which may in turn affect chances for the attainment of specific Goals of sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a plethora of studies on the outrageous “*commercialization of sex*” for “*mutual benefits*” among both the immediate consumers (students) and the suppliers (lecturers) of higher education in Nigeria. As a self-coined terminology, we refer to *the commercialization of sex* in higher institutions of learning in form of “*sex for marks*” which is an unethical mutual understanding or agreement or unwritten consent between a lecturer and his/her student to engage in an illicit sexual relationship in exchange for marks or grade. The actors of this immoral symbiotic relationship normally do not raise an alarm that their rights or personality has been trampled upon as it usually takes willingness and commitment from both parties to partake in such a scandalous act, hence, it normally remained unreported (Aina-Pelemo, Oke, & Alade, 2021; Fadipe & Bakenne, 2020; Imonikhe, Aluede, & Idogho, 2012; Obianyo, 2021; Oyeoku, Ibezim, Agwu, & Okoye, 2022). This is invariable of who makes the first offer and at what social or economic cost what is more important to actors of this sexual insensitivity is their predetermined or anticipated outcome(s) as such the management of these institutions might not have proper records and hence toothless to activate its disciplinary mechanism to checkmate the scandals. Though, we acknowledge a situation whereby the relationship is neither on mutual agreement nor willingly by at least one actor involved even if there is a promise of a positive reward. In this instance, the relationship is not that of the celebrated terminology of *sex for marks* but rather that of sexual harassment.

The menace of sexual harassment by suppliers of higher education (lecturers) to their students of the opposite gender with or without a promise of a gain is of serious concern among relevant stakeholders in the global education industry in general and that of the country in particular. This concern has been re-echoed by all stakeholders in the education sector following (BBC Africa Eye, 2019) released its undercover documentary report on the “Sex for Grades” scandals that inundated tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Ghana respectively. The victims of this harassment and abuse by lecturers of different gender have a heterogeneous socioeconomic background as it affects both students from a highly placed background as well as those from vulnerable households. This form of harassment is believed to have psychological effects on its victims which in turn may negative relationship with students’ academic attainment (Aina-Pelemo et al., 2021; Crowley, Cornell, & Konold, 2021; Fadipe & Bakenne, 2020; Handy, 2006; Lei et al., 2020; Obianyo, 2021; Oyeoku et al., 2022; Stermac, Cripps, Amiri, & Badali, 2020; Zewude & Ashine, 2016). Parental socioeconomic characteristics of students are also believed to be one of the critical factors that influence educational achievement (Dunne, Humphreys, & Leach, 2006; Gruber & Fineran, 2008; Isa & Gaya, 2019; Lei et al., 2020; Nalipay, Cai, & King, 2020; Stermac et al., 2020) with most of these studies silent about the effects of broken home on educational outcome. Attempting to satisfy one's sexual urge violently and without the mutual consent of the victim is therefore one of the issues generating debates among various stakeholders in education. This is because apart from being a breach of trust and displaying of immoral attitude it also constitutes one of the causes of sustainable psychological trauma among its victims.

We, therefore, attempt to examine the likely effects of this immoral and irresponsible attitude and the student's

parental background (broken home) on the academic performance of undergraduate students in northern Nigeria. This is crucial because the region has the lowest school enrolment and is lagging in terms of literacy rate in contrast with the southern region of the country (UNICEF, 2017) and it constitutes one of the perceived factors discriminating against girl child education. The findings from the study may have significant implications on labor market participation as business enterprises' productivity is a function of skilled and semi-skilled labor (Jibir, Abdu, & Buba, 2022) increase labor income is believed to be among the factors that are capable of reducing the alarming rate of chronic poverty and inequality in disadvantage areas like the northern region (Buba, Abdu, Adamu, & Jibir, 2018; Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007; Mihai, Țițan, & Manea, 2015; Suryadarma & Suryahadi, 2010) and can pave way for brighter living standard and overall economic stability.

The paper is therefore set to ascertain the tendencies of attaining higher academic performance (class of degree) by victims of sexual harassment by their lecturers of the opposite gender in northern Nigeria and to ascertain the tendencies of attaining higher academic performance (class of degree) by students that are from a broken home in northern Nigeria.

However, most of the prior studies on student sexual harassment that were conducted in Nigeria were carried out at the high school or secondary school level without focusing on the higher institutions of learning in the country; a majority of these studies also centered on the effects of sexual harassment on learning or academic activities like reading, concentration, and engagement as well as self-awareness for countermeasures without clearly investigating the direct interlinkage or causal effects of this sexual assault on academic performance. We, therefore, underpinned this study to empirically examine how sexual harassment and broken home affects the likelihood of educational attainment among undergraduate students in northern Nigeria which we observed was not explicitly conducted. Nevertheless, the study is unique by reinforcing another vital factor among family background that may have an effect on academic performance and conspicuously neglected in previous studies.

Accordingly, following this introduction, we presented a brief review of the literature in section two, the methodology used in the study and presentation of empirical findings of the study were presented in sections three and four while the conclusion and policy implications were presented in section five respectively.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sexual Harassment and Students' Academic Engagement

Previous studies on sexual harassment and academic activity reveal that sexual assault against students is one of the fundamental obstacles to active and full engagement in academic undertakings (Arria, Barrall, Vincent, Bugbee, & O'Grady, 2020; Zewude & Ashine, 2016). Comparing the impact of bullying and sexual harassment on students' mental health, Gruber and Fineran (2008) established that sexual harassment can have a more adverse effect on mental health than bullying and it occurs on minorities more than ordinary people and in turn, leads to low concentration academic activities. Onoyase (2019) studied the prevalence of sexual harassment and students' academic performance in North Eastern Nigerian Universities. Evidence from the study indicated that sexual harassment is a pervasive and persistent form of violence experienced often daily by the majority of female students. He, therefore, concluded that sexual harassment prevalence in Nigerian universities may have negative impacts on the academic activities of its victims. In a similar development, Omonijo, Uche, Nwadiolor, and Rotimi (2013) found that victims of sexual harassment face some problems in pursuing their dreams due to its emotional and psychological effects. These difficulties include concentration; fear; low self-esteem; and feeling of obtaining lower grades.

2.2. Absence of Family Support and Students' Emotional Balance

Examining the way broken home affect adolescent children's mental well-being Crosby, Salazar, and Geter (2017) argued that children from separated families have few chances for educational success due to decreasing trends in parental finance, time of parental involvement, and approach to community connections which decrease children attachment to their school environment and divert their mind from studies. In addition, parental care and support have been reported to have a considerable effect on other aspects of children's life including their psychological and mental well-being (Kakavoulis, 2001; Roberts, 2007); literacy (Gruber & Fineran, 2008) career maturity (Lim & You, 2019) emotional regulation and social problem solving (Bozkurt Yükcü & Demircioğlu, 2021) self-treatment of disorders like autism spectrum (Akemoglu & Tomeny, 2021); and disruptive behaviors (Magelang & Japar, 2017) Parental care and support is considered to have a preventive effect against unwanted behavior due to its absence as it has been reported to have cushion effect between cyber poly-victimization and academic outcomes (Wright & Wachs, 2021).

Furthermore, the conducive home atmosphere has an immense influence on the academic performance of students (Parmar & Nathans, 2022) and according to Achilike (2017) parents' constant disagreement affects children emotionally and this could lead to poor academic performance in school. This implies that a child from household that the parents are living together in a compassionate and/or harmony have chances of creating a favorable environment for children's mental development in contrast with a child from a single-parental family background. According to this view, the absence of one parent from the household due to divorce, employment, or any reason may be problematic for children's mental wellbeing and socialization and subsequently affects their academic performance negatively. This view indicated that the problem of a broken home can affect a child's academic performance right from the primary level which could lead to academic failure up to the university level due to psychological ill balance.

2.3. Broken Home and Students' Academic Engagement

Existing literature suggests that parental involvement in the academic pursuit of their kids played an important role in the subsequent academic of their respective children right from the elementary level (Etor, Ekanem, & Sule, 2020; Haryanto, Ghufron, Suyantiningsih, & Kumala, 2022; Izugbara, 2005; Wright & Wachs, 2021). A study conducted by Okoree, Sedegah, and Parku (2020) found that children from a broken home are performing poorly after the divorce or separation of their parents to periods before the separation. Bano (2020) also reported a lack of maternal life and parental un-involvement as a barrier to primary school completion and transition to a higher level of education in northern Nigeria. The few that were able to proceed to the tertiary institutions may likely find it difficult to cope with the demand for learning at a higher level, eventually, it may adversely affect their chances of graduating with a good class degree. Thus, this indicates that not only does parental socioeconomic background have an influence on students' educational attainment but also the social status of the parents whether they are married and living together or otherwise may have serious effects on students' academic attainment (Imonikhe et al., 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data

Data used in the study was collected using an online survey form (google form) which was distributed to the targeted participants through email, WhatsApp messages, and Facebook; and the survey period start from March 7, 2021 to April 29, 2021 respectively with an overall 178 undergraduate students that voluntarily participated in the survey. The questionnaire adequately captured the major focus of the study and it strictly solicits responses from students that are in year 4 of their undergraduate program and the respective program of study by the respondents

is a maximum of either 4 or 5 years in conventional universities. Thus, any student that is not registered for his or her fourth-year academic calendar is automatically excluded while processing the data.

Prospective participants of the survey were randomly selected from 6 higher institutions in northern Nigeria. These consist of 2 institutions from each geopolitical zone in the north with one Federal and one State University respectively. The selected institutions include the University of Jos and Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai from North Central; the University of Maiduguri and Gombe State University from North East; and Bayero University Kano and Kaduna State University from North West respectively.

The online survey instrument was designed into five categories. Viz; inclusion or exclusion criteria; student's academic background in his or her current institutions of learning; family background; incidence of sexual harassment; and demographic characteristics of the respondents. As an introduction, the questionnaire explained the purpose of the survey and gave assurance of confidentiality to the subject of the study to ensure adherence to social science research ethics.

3.2. Hypothesis

To achieve our main objectives, we hypothesized that:

- i. *Students that are victims of sexual harassment by their lecturers of the opposite sex have less tendency of attaining higher academic performance expressed in terms of a class of degree.*
- ii. *Students that are from a broken home (divorced, single parent, and living with one parent due to employment) are less likely to attain higher academic performance than those that are not from a broken home.*

3.3. Model Specification

The following empirical model was used in measuring the effects of sexual harassment and broken home on the likelihood of educational attainment among undergraduate students in northern Nigeria.

$$prob(CGPA_i = j) = \frac{\exp(X_{ij}^1 \beta_i)}{\sum_{j=1}^4 \exp(X_{ij}^1 \beta_i)} \quad j = 1,2,3,4. \quad X_i = Harras_i, Broken_i, Family_i, Demo_i \quad (1)$$

When transformed into a linear regression model, Equation 1 above thus becomes:

$$prob(CGPA_i = j) = \alpha + \beta_1 Harras_i + \beta_2 Broken_i + \beta_3 Family_i + \beta_4 Demo_i + \mu_i \quad (2)$$

Where:

$CGPA_i$ = Student's cumulative grade point average as per the previous semester

α = constant term

$Harras_i$ = A dummy for incidence of sexual harassment if yes = 1, otherwise = 0

$Broken_i$ = A dummy for broken home if yes = 1, otherwise = 0

$Family_i$ = Vector of student's parental socioeconomic background

$Demo_i$ = A vector for student demographic characteristics

β_{is} = parameters of estimates

μ_i = error term

The above variables are explained with the help of Table 1.

Table 1. Variables definition.

Variables	Definition
CGPA (Dependent variable)	Student's cumulative grade average
Harassment	A dummy if a student is harassed sexually by a lecturer of different gender =1, otherwise=0
Broken home	A dummy if a student is from a broken home=1, otherwise=0
Family background	A vector of a student's family background including
Parental sponsorship	A dummy if a student is sponsored by his/her parent=1, otherwise=0
Public school	A dummy if a student's former Secondary School is public=1, otherwise=0
Father has postsecondary education	A dummy if a student's father has postsecondary educational qualification=1, otherwise=0
Mother has postsecondary education	A dummy if a student's mother has postsecondary educational qualification=1, otherwise=0
Father employed	A dummy if a student's father is employed=1, otherwise=0
Log of mother's monthly income	Log of the monthly income of the student's mother
Demographic variables	A vector of student's demographic characteristics including age, gender, marital status, and employment status
Age	Age of student in complete years
Age2	Age square of a student
Male	A dummy if a student is male=1, female=0
Self employed	A dummy if a student is employed=1, otherwise=0
Married student	A dummy if a student is married=1, otherwise=0

Table 2. Effects of sexual harassment and broken home on students' academic performance (Dependent variable is academic performance proxied by CGPA).

Independent variables	Ologit
Harassment	-0.307 (0.515)
Broken home	-0.957** (0.390)
Family background	
Parental sponsorship	0.506 (0.407)
Public school	-0.328 (0.367)
Father has postsecondary education	0.884** (0.411)
Mother has postsecondary education	-1.140*** (0.430)
Father employed	0.790** (0.400)
Log of mother's monthly income	0.292** (0.136)
Demographic variables	
Age	1.000 (0.705)
Age2	-0.0192 (0.0135)
Male	-1.173*** (0.439)
Married student	-1.211* (0.623)
Self employed	-0.989** (0.405)
/Cut1	12.31 (9.492)
/Cut2	15.44 (9.542)
/Cut3	18.97** (9.559)
Observations	143

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. ***, **, and * indicate significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% respectively

3.4. Data Analysis

To achieve our preoccupation, the data was processed using Stata 14, and ordered logistic regression analysis was used to estimate the effects of incidence of sexual harassment and broken home on students' academic achievement while controlling for the family background as well as students' demographic characteristics. The choice of ordered logistic regression was informed by the nature of the data particularly the dependent variable which is categorical with natural ranking and the objective of the research. Also, a test for proportional odds assumption (Brant-Wald test) was conducted and the result obtained indicated that we have no justification to reject our model.

3.5. Empirical Results

Estimates from the model of higher education students' academic performance as a function of the tendency of sexual harassment from a lecturer of a different gender as well as broken home presented in [Table 2](#) revealed that the explanatory variables are strong determinants that influence the likelihood of student performance in Nigeria after controlling for socioeconomic background and demographic characteristics of the students. Evidence from the study also concurred with the theoretical propositions of the study as almost all the coefficients of estimates included in the model have expected signs (except for the coefficient of sexual harassment which is not statistically significant).

Empirical findings from the survey indicated that a student from a broken home is less likely to attain a higher class of degree at a 5 percent level of significance. A student whose father has post-secondary school qualification, and his or her father is gainfully employed has a positive probability of attaining a higher class of degree at a 5 percent level of significance respectively. On the contrary, the empirical result portrayed that a male undergraduate student, a married student, and one who is self-employed has negative tendencies of attaining higher class of degree at varying level of significance as indicated in the table.

Empirical findings of this study demonstrated an interesting fact about the effects of our variables of interest on students' academic performance. The result showed that students from broken homes have serious challenges in terms of obtaining good educational outcomes ([Dunne et al., 2006](#); [Gruber & Fineran, 2008](#); [Isa & Gaya, 2019](#); [Julia, 2021](#); [Omoteso, 2002](#)). Although sexual harassment has been previously established to have negative consequences on educational attainment ([Dunne et al., 2006](#); [Edinyang, Effiom, & Unimtiang, 2020](#); [Gruber & Fineran, 2008](#); [Lei et al., 2020](#)) we found it to be not statistically different from zero in our study. In addition, the socioeconomic status of parents has a strong and significant impact on student's academic achievement which indicate that our study to a certain degree conforms to the findings of [Battle and Lewis \(2002\)](#); [Bozkurt, Coban, Ozdemir, and Ozdemir \(2021\)](#); and [Timoty \(2015\)](#).

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

We examined how the incidence of sexual harassment by lecturers of the opposite gender and broken homes affects the likelihood of attaining higher educational outcomes among undergraduate students in northern Nigeria. Estimates from the study suggested that both sexual harassment and broken home have a negative likelihood on chances of achieving higher educational outcomes although the coefficient of sexual harassment is not significant. We also control for other key variables that are known to have strong effects on students' performance. Hence, we conclude that students from broken homes have a disadvantage against their counterparts who are not from broken homes concerning the chances of achieving a greater academic outcome.

The result has serious socioeconomic implications both in the short run and long run. The short-run implication is that there will be inequality between these groups of students in terms of their academic performance which in turn will affect their chances of being absorbed or employed in the labor market. The long-run consequence is that the

higher the proportion of graduates from broken homes the greater the likelihood of having manpower shortfalls that will be employed in various critical sectors of the economy which in turn will lead to the non-realization of developmental goals of northern Nigeria in particular and the country in general (Buba et al., 2018; Ferguson et al., 2007; Jibir et al., 2022). Hence, if the problem of a broken home is left unabated it has the potential of leading to unbalanced growth and development in Nigeria. Therefore, it is pertinent for relevant stakeholders to work hard and bring balance, psychological therapy, and boost the confidence of the affected students to avoid unwanted effects.

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