

Understanding Physical and Mental Sexual Harassment of Women In Sub-Saharan Politics: A Comparative Analysis Of Nigeria And Uganda (1999-2019)

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Abstract

Recent studies have shown that violence against women politicians in sub-Saharan Africa is increasingly recognized globally as a key impediment to their participation in politics. This follows the troubling increase in documented cases of abuse, threat, harassment and intimidation aimed at women politicians on the continent. Consequently, bias toward women occupying political positions originates from the structural, cultural and symbolic violence, which differentiates this practice from other forms of political violence. This study provides an extensive understanding of the physical and mental sexual harassment of women in sub-Saharan African politics. It draws attention comparatively to this conundrum by drawing on the experience of women in Nigeria and Uganda. While it is a known that sexual harassment pervades the Nigerian and Ugandan political space, available data are very slim since cases are often underreported and when they do, are not pursued to a logical conclusion. A major impact of this is that women are reluctant to participate and be involved in the political and decision-making framework of their respective countries. In this study, primary and secondary sources were adopted and critically examined and analysed. The methodology adopted is based on content analysis of the sources used. Part of the results of the study shows that sexual harassment is associated with sexuality, patriarchy and gender power differences which is a huge factor that helps to perpetuate the conduct in sub-Saharan Africa. Secondly, gender-based violence against women has become normalised accounting for why women are often the victims of the conduct.

Keyword: Sexual harassment, Nigeria/Uganda, Gender-based violence, Women in politics, Sub-Saharan Africa

DOI: 10.7176/JAAS/80-07

Publication date: July 31st 2022

1. Introduction

Several studies have shown that violence perpetrated against women politicians is increasingly recognized globally as a key impediment to their involvement and participation in politics. This follows the troubling increase in documented cases of abuse, threat, assault, harassment and intimidation aimed at women politicians. A conceptual conundrum, however, exists in terms of the specific form this phenomenon takes which explains the intention of this study to strengthen its empirical, theoretical and methodological groundings. Consequently, bias toward women occupying political positions originated from the structural, cultural and symbolic violence, which differentiates this practice from other forms of political violence.

According to recent studies, women are said to face five types of violence in politics. These are physical, psychological, sexual, economic and semiotic. Violence committed against female politicians commenced with structural violence which involves the configuration of access to basic wants based on ascribing group integration. Built into the social structure, this particular type of configuration results in harm in terms of inequality which affects the human body and mind. The structural origins of the exclusion of women in politics began with political theories which associate the male with the public space and the private space for the female. This imbalance has significantly limited the mobility of women and sometimes in countries where no legal restrictions are placed on women's movement in public spaces. Structural violence has been considered to spur and defend hostility towards women political actors, resulting from their perceived status violations. In the realm of political violence, which is viewed as the use or threatened use of force in other to accomplish a political objective, an immense challenge is posed to democracy when perpetrators override the victim by amplifying fear of death or injury rather than

adhere to a procedure for which both parties are in agreement to. Recent studies on this subject broaden this agenda in the area of threats and intimidation against women who show interest or hold a political portfolio.

Sexual harassment has been viewed from very diverse standpoints, from the psychological, sociological, religious and cultural, to the political, sex-based, feminist, legal and behavioral perspectives. It is even considered a “complex and evolving practice” (Franks, 2012: 657). Within the context of the legal, sexual harassment can be viewed from the angle of sex discrimination emerging from two forms of behavior. The first is referred to as quid pro quo harassment and the second, hostile environment harassment (Welsh, 1999: 169). While the former comes in form of sexual threats or bribery spurred on the condition or basis of granting a favour, the latter entails forms of behaviour, for instance, sexual slurs, abuses, jokes or improper touching of the body which impacts one’s ability to perform an assigned job or one that creates an unfriendly environment.

The meanings attached to sexual harassment have proved difficult over the years to concertize. What we have are definitions or terms that suit specific fields of study or professions or even thinking. This has made it difficult to give a popularly accepted “social definition that would help people who are targets of sexual harassment to readily identify such behaviour” (Uggen and Blackstone, 2004: 66). Despite the diverse views on what sexual harassment constitutes in terms of clarity, a position that most people share is that the term is specific to deliberate, persistent and unwelcome conduct that is sexual and, in other cases, gender based. It is this simple definition that this article intends to adopt.

In Nigeria and Uganda, the root cause of physical and mental harassment of women is not unconnected with the historical, socio-political, economic and cultural underpinning factors which continue to ensure the subjugation, oppression, physical and mental harassment, as well as the domination of women by men in politics and other spheres in sub-Saharan Africa. The gender inequality created by the colonization spike the humiliation of women in present-time Africa. Gender equality concerns relative parity as per proportion and numbers of both genders. This is mainly calculated as the ratio of men-to-women values for a specific indicator (Adjepong, 2015). When a bisection of the world’s population cannot participate fully and accord equally to any endeavour, performance is demeaning. (Agbalajobi, 2010). Every section of society feels the negative impact when the women’s influence is not reckoned with at the frontline and made use of for more excellent outcomes. This gender hierarchical organization designate rights and obligations in the aspect of physiological differences between man and woman. The former is often considered physically stronger than the latter and is, therefore, required to participate more in physically-intense activities and labour-oriented roles.

2. Theoretical Framework

The subject of gender, sex and sexuality has pre-occupied a central discourse among feminist movements for a long period. Feminist sociologists and other scholars in diverse and related disciplines have come up with several theoretical postulations which explain the place of gender difference and gender inequality (Acker, 1991; Blumberg, 1978; Chafetz, 1988). The feminist movement belongs to a group of mostly women who advocate for reforms on different issues affecting women. The earliest known feminist movement started around the 1840s in the United States and continued in different waves from the 1960s to the 1990s and up to the late 2000s which is shaped by the use of technology and spurred the #metoo and #timesup movements.

One of the prominent names in the feminist movement was Janet Saltzman Chafetz, a United States based professor of sociology. Chafetz’s studies on gender roles and sociology of gender including a plethora of works on the subject stood her out among scholars in her field. Saltzman argues that theorizing gender does not necessitate a feminist view and although scholars in sociology have examined gender, much of what they espouse could hardly be regarded as feminist (Chafetz, 1999). In her view, a feminist theory needs to discern gender as a “system of inequality” that can be changed rather than conceived as a permanent feature of society. She notes further that once this position is agreed upon, a commitment is then made to create what she calls a “gender-equitable system” (Chafetz, 2001: 613).

Chafetz’s theory, unlike others in her field, try to systematically explain how gender inequality occurs which is separate from the aspect of social life required to be modified. Her argument is based on the fact that systems that perpetuate gender inequality can change to become more and less inequitable. However, her concept or definition of gender inequality within the context of a feminist view is a difference “in the level of power and resources to which, on average, men and women have access...in the amount and types of opportunities and constraints, they

typically confront” (Chafetz, 2001: 614). These constraints, in her view, are created mainly by societal institutions that include the economy, educational system, and cultural and religious institutions among others.

Chafetz’s theory fits strongly into the idea espoused in this article as it does not take a feminist position but rather an exploration of the system that privileges inequality in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria and Uganda as case studies, that impact women in most cases. Her definition which sees gender inequality from the lens of difference in power and resources and the lack of opportunities and access confronted by women is well suited to the context of the argument in this study. How is this so? Gender inequality is perpetuated in many societies because the level of access to the opportunities set up within a society between the male and female gender is tilted favourably towards the male. This makes women somewhat vulnerable and easily manipulated. Since they have been deliberately dispossessed by the structural system in place, they are targeted for harassment in the private and public realms. In political contexts, this becomes even more concretised because their numbers are few and, in most cases, it is usually those who are part of the male circle that political doors are open for.

3. Literature Review

There is a suggestion that the pervasive harassment of women based on their sex is a consequence of social deviation (Leskinen, 2012). As a result, women experience rape, sexual harassment and violence by spouses and non-intimate partners with strangers not left out also. In both private and public spaces, sexual harassment is usually neglected by employers in order to understate its intensity and to allow it to fester (Pierce et al, 1998). This continues to occur because many cases are underreported or swept immediately under the carpet when they occur.

Cases of sexual harassment remained prevalent and ignored until a time when in the United States, the Civil Rights Movement took a political initiative in the 1960s to address the issue but also to prepare the ground for a significant understanding and explanation of what sexual harassment is in regards to the peculiar factor of gender discrimination (Melnick, 2018). A specific definition was given during the Women’s Movement popular around the 1970s where the focus was placed on the diverse composition of gender-based violence towards women (Baker, 2007). It was this that triggered interest in the subject by academics, legal scholars, social scientists among others in related and non-related fields who came up with various perspectives on what constitutes sexual harassment.

4. Methodology

The use of interviews is an important tool deployed in the study in order to gain practical insight into the character of sexual harassment and gender-based exclusion of women in politics. Since very little data exist coupled with the fact that there are very few women that are active in politics as elected representatives of the people or appointees of usually a male-dominated government or society, the method of analysis will be content-driven. What this suggests is that the response in the interviews will be subjected to content analysis to make sense of or understand the physical and mental sexual harassment women face in everyday life in sub-Saharan Africa.

5. Results and Discussion

What is Sexual Harassment?

The question above is a difficult one to respond to given the understanding of what the term, sexual harassment connotes from one society to another. This explains why several definitions herald the term. While international organisations, particularly those dealing with issues around women, have their specific ideas on what sexual harassment connotes, regional, continental, national and sub-national states also have different views on the subject. Despite these varied positions by each polity, there is an agreement that the act occurs in everyday life across the world and mostly affects women, although men and children are also impacted by the behaviour (Eskridge Jr., 2004). It is also agreed that sexual harassment victims face one form of mental, psychological or physical health challenge, particularly when justice is not adequately served.

Notwithstanding, it is noteworthy to state that globally, women experience one form of violence or the other and live under this challenge daily (MacKinnon, 1979). Women, since time immemorial, have been victims of men's hubris, a behaviour that was usually condoned by society as well as approved by the judicial system. In many societies, men were permitted to mete out physical assault on their wives and even murder them. The case of honour killings in modern India continues unabated and has its roots in ancient Hindu scriptures (Shoro, 2019). In medieval Europe, the church and state sanctioned the burning of witches who were mostly women (Levack, 2013). In Nigeria, women experience all kinds of physical and verbal harassment across local markets and are usually assaulted when they refuse to purchase a good from the seller (Raheem & Adejo, 2022). Throughout history and into contemporary times, men have caused serious atrocities upon women mainly because of their sex or gender. Women have not been free from violence and being harassed is not a new phenomenon as the behaviour continues with the same vigour in contemporary times (Segrave, 1994).

Sexual harassment is defined by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as sexual advances and requests for sexual favours that are unwelcome among other physical or verbal behaviour linked to a sexual nature (USEEOC, undated). The Commission notes that "when this explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment," then a sexual misconduct has occurred (USEEOC, undated). Before the 1970s and up to the early 1980s, it was difficult to find a word that specifically identify conducts that could be considered improper in the context in which such conduct occurred. However, conduct that shows a sexual connotation and which is unwelcome is termed sexual harassment.

While this definition may appear straightforward, the term, sexual connotation, requires some more explanation. According to MacKinnon (1979), sexual harassment is the enforcement of sexual requisite that is undesired in the circumstance of an association of unbalanced power. Others such as Uggen and Blackstone (2004) define the term within the context of class, age, caste, gender and race of the victim. The International Labour Organisation (2015) takes sexual harassment to mean a conduct "of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of women and men, which is considered as unwanted, unacceptable, inappropriate and offensive to the recipient, and that creates an intimidating, hostile, unstable or offensive work environment."

Based on an aggregation of theoretical and empirical positions, sexual harassment is viewed by Fitzgerald (1990) as the "sexualisation of an instrumental relationship through the introduction or imposition of sexual remarks, requests or requirements in the context of formal power differences." Given the above definition, it is clear that they all suffer from one limitation or the other and as such have no complementary link to what Jiloha (2021) refers to as psychological consequences.

5.1 Types of Sexual Harassment

Why it has proved difficult to point out the different types of sexual harassment conduct is because it is a term that is viewed from various fields of study among scholars. The sociological angle (Lach and Wartney-Gibbs, 1993, 102-115) is one while the legal (Chan, 1994) and behavioral (Harned et al, 2002, 174-188) lenses are another. Some scholars appraise sexual harassment from two angles - the bothersome and the frightening (Isis et al, 2011, 600-608). Three forms of sexual harassment, in a broad sense, have been identified by D'Amore Law Group (2020) which are verbal, non-verbal sexual harassment as well as physical sexual contact.

Verbal sexual harassment implies an expression that is verbal but of a sexual nature to a person considered to be a disinclined recipient (Shoukry, 2008). Examples of this are commenting on a person's appearance; giving expression of the desire to carry out sexual conduct; telling sexual jokes; making use of sexually suggestive nicknames or terms of endearment; requesting sexual favours; speaking in a sexual tone; using sexually explicit language among others. In the case of non-verbal sexual harassment, this involves unwanted sexual behavior that is non-verbal and cannot be counted as a physical sexual encounter (Shoukry, 2008). Examples include forwarding sexually explicit emails or text messages; blowing kisses to an opposite or same sex; stalking and exposing one's body deliberately among others. The third category is physical sexual contact which involves undesired physical interaction regarded as sexual assault, although this depends on the intensity of the contact. Instances of this include unwanted kissing, hugging or touching; grabbing or patting at the back, and groping to mention a few (D'Amore Law Group, 2020).

Notwithstanding the different scholarly positions that are used to sustain the arguments on the number or types of sexual harassment conduct found in everyday life, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides an interesting category that has since been a model for many countries around the world in terms of sexual

harassment types. The EEOC is a United States federal government agency that enforces laws that prohibit the discrimination of persons associated with their race, disability, beliefs, gender, age, origin, colour or genetic condition (EEOC).

Two types of sexual harassment have been formulated under the United States Civil Rights Act (Title VII) - quid pro quo and hostile work environment sexual harassment. The former, that is quid pro quo, is to ask for a thing in exchange for another and from the literal meaning, suggests an exchange of sexual favour in other to gain or claim some workplace benefit (Dickinson, 1995, 108-109). For instance, this type of sexual harassment may occur when a higher-ranked employee requests sexual favours from a lower-ranked employee in return for a benefit, senior promotion or higher wages that other employees are excluded from although they merit such. In this case, this higher-ranked employee usually has the power to provide the favour (Lee & Greenlaw, 1996). Quid pro quo sexual harassment emerges often as a one-time act rather than following a set pattern of behavior. This is done to gain grounds for making claims of quid pro quo sexual harassment.

A Hostile Work Environment, as the name implies, is a category of sexual harassment which occur when a hostile work environment is created in an organization (Crain, 1995). This behavior may be perpetrated by anyone, whether such a person is a high-ranking employee, co-worker, supervisor or client. Harassment of this nature does not necessarily have to be targeted at a victim directly (Brennan, 1995). What this means is that one can be a victim of this type of sexual harassment even if it directly affects a co-worker or superior. For instance, indecent pictures sent to a co-worker or lewd expressions of a sexual nature targeted at a family member may cause mental, psychological or other harmful effects upon the person which affects the productivity or sociable nature of the victim (Mellor and Golay, 2014). Despite not being directly affected, a victim's poor frame of mind affects the work rate or relationship of those not directly affected by a hostile work environment.

5.2 Past and Present Sexual Harassment Cases in Politics: Nigeria and Uganda

While sexual harassment is prevalent in the workplace for which research has been carried out, dearth of research exists on the same challenge in the political arena. Even when the MeToo movement emerged a few years ago (Hillstrom, 2019), many of the perpetrators came from the public and private sectors. What this suggests, in other words, is that cases of sexual harassment appear greater in the workplace than in the political space. This argument is not likely to be true, although there are very few available data that help to confirm the degree or level of sexual harassment that abound in the realm of politics.

The case of three Nigerian legislators accused by the U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria of sexual harassment while on an official trip to the country in 2016 did not create the sort of uproar that such a case would have generated elsewhere (Saharareporters, 2016). Since 2016 when the case was reported by the US government, no consequences have been meted on the perpetrators of such behavior. While women than men are usually the victim of cases of sexual harassment in politics, their case is not helped by several other challenges they face such as religious and cultural prejudice, economic challenges, and violence among others (Oyekola, 2021).

Cases of sexual harassment in Ugandan politics can be viewed from the lens of social media where women who indicate interest in politics experience online bullying, sexualized insults, and body shaming among others (Achieng, 2021). In a recent study by a Ugandan-based feminist civic tech organization, three women were observed to have been the victim of online violence while 66 per cent blocked perpetrators who committed online sexual harassment. Also, 14.5 per cent went on to deactivate their social media accounts to avoid abuses (Kakande, 2021). The peculiarity in Ugandan politics stems from the fact that the presidential election, for the first time, was held deploying scientific tools which meant that electoral campaigns were held virtually online. The reason for this change in the electoral process was to align with prevention measures necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. To engage with voters, politicians, including women, take advantage of digital and social media tools. Despite the very serious sexual harassment cases, women politicians in Uganda faced, very little was done by the regulatory agencies and government as a whole to try to bring perpetrators to book.

Nigeria's population, according to the National Population Commission (NPC), puts males at approximately 51 per cent and 49 per cent of females. In terms of elective positions, the population figures do not favour Nigerian women. Before the 2015 national elections, women's rights groups predicted that there would be a low record of representation by women which was subsequently justified against the backdrop of the prediction and the election's outcome (Quadri, 2018). As examined in the previous chapter, several factors have been attributed to the poor representation, participation and political inclusion of women in Nigeria. The Centre for Development and

Democracy (2019) identify a few which include lack of funds, party structure, religion, and lack of awareness to mention others.

Table 1: Representation by Gender in the Nigerian Senate and Lower House (1999-2019)

Election Year	Senate					House of Representatives				
	Seats	Men	%	Women	%	Seats	Men	%	Women	%
1999	109	106	97.2	3	2.8	360	347	96.4	13	3.6
2003	109	105	96.3	4	3.7	360	339	94.2	21	5.8
2007	109	100	91.7	9	8.3	360	333	92.5	27	7.5
2012	109	102	93.5	7	6.5	360	335	93.1	25	6.9
2015	109	102	93.5	7	6.5	360	338	94	22	6
2019	109	102	93.5	7	6.5	360	350	97.2	10	2.7

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2017)

Table 1 shows the percentage of male and female representation in Nigeria's Senate and House of Representatives between 1999 and 2019. A careful look at the number of Senate seats between men and women shows in the periods under consideration that the percentage of women each year did not increase significantly. In the House of Representatives, the percentage for the periods under study went from high to low. For instance, in the 1999 election, women secured a meagre 6.5 per cent seat in the Senate while in the House of Representatives, women constituted a paltry percentage of 2.7 per cent. The message the data passes across is that for every election cycle, women's numbers in politics continue to dwindle in favour of the men.

While the abysmal number of women in the nation's federal parliament cannot be said to be encouraging, the data is more worrisome in the executive arm of government. As indicated earlier, Nigeria is yet to produce a women president or vice president while women in executive positions, whether female representation at the federal or sub-national levels have remained low. Since 1990, the number of women ministerial appointees has been abysmal. Table 4.3 shows data between 1999 and 2019 where at the beginning of Nigeria's democratic experimentation, only eleven female ministers were appointed as against 89 male ministers. In 2015 and 2019 respectively, the number moved from five to seven which is, indeed, not proportionate to the number of men appointed in the period under study.

Table 2: Ministerial Political Position in Terms of Gender (1999-2019)

1999		2003		2007		2012		2015		2019	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
89	11	38	4	83	12	53	15	31	5	32	7

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2017)

For much of Uganda's political history, women have been at the backwaters of the country's decision-making framework. This means that women held minimal political office positions until when President Yoweri Museveni seized power in 1986. Unlike Nigeria which has persistently shown very little concern about uplifting women politically, Museveni championed women's rights by advancing their cause politically, particularly by reserving for them several positions in the executive and legislative arms of government. This policy was also extended to the local councils where the government reserved seats for women in virtually all aspects of government bureaucracy such that by 1989, after only two years in power, women held at least one-third of seats in government.

There is no doubt that this structure put in place by Museveni helped to increase women's seats in parliament which had a very strong impact on the aspect of the adoption of women's rights legislation. Critics, however, claim that the high number of women in Uganda's legislature is incapacitated by patronage as well as the undemocratic nature of its political system.

Figure 1: Proportion of seat women hold in Uganda's parliament (1999-2019)



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (1998)

Notwithstanding criticism that continues to trail Uganda's efforts at advancing women's position in the country's legislature and executive arm, figure 4 above shows a steady rise in the participation and active role of women in parliament. From the data provided in figure 4, it shows that from 1999, the proportion of seats occupied by women in parliament rose from an appreciable 18 per cent to a staggering 35 per cent within a space of 20 years. Although there was a slight downward trend around 2005, this grew exponentially between 2006 and 2011 and remained within the same orbit until 2015 when it witnessed yet another slight downward trend and slowly picked up, returning to the pre-2011 to 2015 levels.

Interestingly, the outcome of the parliamentary election in Uganda for women was poor between 1996 and 2006. However, in the 2006-2011 multiparty period, several laws were passed in favour of women. With this new multiparty development, women in Uganda have taken the opportunity to advance their cause. As the number of women in the legislature surged, it encouraged in many ways the passage of policies that are pro-women. Some other factors such as the presence of the women's caucus in the legislature, the support extended to women by male parliamentarians, and the cordial relationship between women parliamentarians and prominent figures in the aid community as well as civil society groups have also helped in strengthening women's grip on the political process in Uganda.

In many ways, society plays a role in the perpetuation of gender-based abuse. The normalisation of sexual harassment and its acceptance is linked to a culture that hardly challenges nor questions such behaviour but rather accepts it. What this article has, therefore, considered is to demonstrate power inequalities and differences which are used to subordinate the powerless and marginal groups in contemporary society. Sexual harassment is identified in this chapter as more of a social construction. To do this sufficiently, the article approached the discussion through a constructive presentation of various data and analysis of ways in which women are sexually harassed with emphasis on the political sphere.

Conclusion

Women's rights and inclusion in everyday political life in Nigeria and Uganda continue to attract discussions and debates within the continent and in the international community. Women's political standing on the African sub-continent, as experienced in the developed economies, has been marked by poor representation, lack of access and properly developed schooling and training systems required for positions of power as a whole. There is also the case of excessive dominance by the male folk in decision-making policies, lack of finances or resources and unbalanced political appointments in all layers of government. Given that this poses a great threat to the collective rights and equality of women in the sub-continent, it de-emphasizes the importance of the Beijing Conventions and Affirmative Action on women's rights. The failure to address this issue poses a further risk to the future of

democracy in Nigeria and Uganda. In addressing the problem of gender relations, there is a need to challenge the walls erected by patriarchy and all forms of gender-based inequality in all layers of life (Bruey, 2021).

This article contributes an across-the-board and holistic examination and understanding of physical and mental sexual harassment in sub-Saharan Africa with emphasis on Nigeria and Uganda. The article's objective provides a detailed understanding of the social and cultural factors as well as those that contribute to the forms of sexual harassment within Nigeria and Uganda's political framework. The review of the extant works and the gendered character of sexual harassment was discussed in detail while sexual harassment was defined based on the reviews while the various forms, phases and paradigms of sexual harassment were subsequently examined. The article established the fact that sexual harassment is associated with sexuality, patriarchy and gender power differences while noting the effect of sexual harassment on victims as well as the way violence against women is normalized across several societies. The conclusion of this article shows would-be perpetrators of sexual harassment in any form, and most importantly within the realm of politics, should be made to understand the consequences of such behavior through very stringent laws.

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